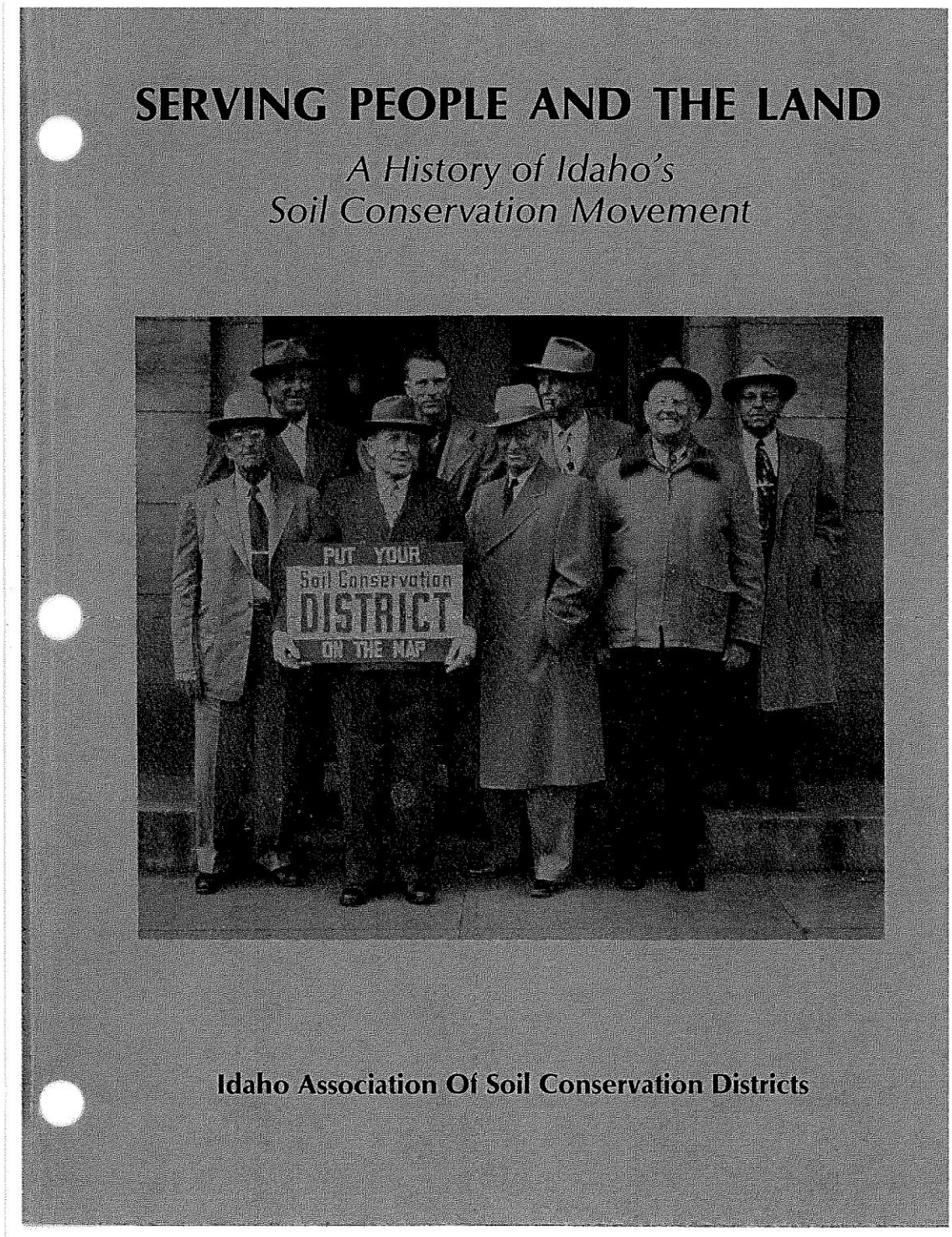
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – "Serving People and the Land"



SERVING PEOPLE AND THE LAND

A History of Idaho's
Soil Conservation Movement

Edited By
Renee Guillierie
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Consulting Editor
Gale H. Chambers

"Take care of the land and the land will take care of you."

Hugh Hammond Bennett
January 1947

Cover: 1954 directors of the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts. Left to right, front row — Jesse Basil, Prairie; E.R. "Dick" Buehler, Pocatello; Frank Goodwin, Sweet; Wilfrid Jensen, Rexburg. Back row — G.B. "Slats" Wilson, Culdesac; Donald J. Jensen, St. Maries; Don Fredericksen, Gooding; Thure Anderson, Roberts, (past director).

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February 1985

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Preface

Idaho's first conservation districts were organized in 1940. Today, 51 conservation districts are working to protect Idaho's soil and water resources. Idaho's conservation districts were organized as part of a national movement in response to the great Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

Conservation districts work closely with the Soil Conservation Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Together, districts and the Soil Conservation Service have helped more than two million farmers, ranchers, and other land users care for America's soil and water.

April 27, 1985, marks the golden anniversary of the creation of the Soil Conservation Service as a USDA agency. To commemorate this anniversary and acknowledge Idaho's oldest conservation movement, we set out in 1983 to develop an audio-visual program about the state's conservation districts. We found an almost total absence of information about the work and accomplishments of Idaho's conservation districts. This book was written to provide a public record of the natural resource problems that gave rise to this movement and to acknowledge the many people who have volunteered thousands of hours to protect and preserve Idaho's soil, water, and other natural resources.

Conserving soil and water has always been a traditional, mainstream effort. Conservation district officials are primarily farmers and ranchers. Their work seldom generates controversy or makes newspaper headlines. But acre by acre, their work has increased the productivity of Idaho agriculture and helped ensure a promising future for rural families and communities.

Soil erosion, the major problem that Idaho's conservation districts were organized to address, has not been eliminated over the past 45 years. New problems such as urban development on prime agricultural land and water pollution have arisen. Urban land users are increasingly turning to districts for assistance in protecting their soil and water resources.

Many conservation districts originally operated from the homes and cars of volunteer supervisors. Getting conservation practices on the ground was more important to these volunteers than keeping records of their activities. The names of some individuals who contributed to important accomplishments of districts have undoubtedly been omitted, as have important events. Whenever possible, the information presented in this book was checked against available public records. We, the editors, accept responsibility for any oversights and errors that may be found in this history.

It is our hope that this history will help you, the reader, recognize what has already been accomplished and what remains to be done to protect Idaho's soil and water resources. We trust, too, that you will join with your local conservation district to conserve and enhance our state's resource base.

Acknowledgements

Each of Idaho's 51 conservation districts compiled its own history for this book. District supervisors and their secretaries and information officers researched and wrote many of the histories. Employees of the Soil Conservation Service working with districts also did much of the research and original writing. Combing old records and newspaper clippings and interviewing former supervisors and volunteers, these people uncovered the details and memories that give each district history its own distinct character.

District secretaries were especially helpful in compiling the list of names of former district supervisors included in the book. Their attention to detail, concern for accuracy, and willingness to research and verify information made it possible to complete this book on deadline. Novella Waltz tracked and verified hundreds of details and considerably lightened the editors' work load. Gene Claridge kept the office work going so others could work on this book.

Wayne Faude contributed portions of the introductory text and energetically supported the book's publication. The chairman of each district reviewed his district's edited history. Others who read the manuscript and offered suggestions included Lee Holstine, Amos Garrison, and Doyle Scott. Their ideas and insights added continuity and strength to the book.

Gale Chambers lent valuable encouragement and support, as well as editorial skills, to this book. A long-time supporter of conservation districts, Gale again proved himself a true friend to Idaho's soil and water conservation movement.

Finally, publication of this book would not have been possible without financial support from the following businesses and organizations:

Federal Land Bank Association of Boise
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Idaho Wheat Growers Association
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Mountain Bell
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Soil Conservation Society of America, Inland Empire Chapter
Soil Conservation Society of America, R.N. Irving Chapter
Soil Conservation Service
Utah Power and Light

Serving people and the land

Care of our state's soil and water resources is a responsibility all Idaho citizens share — today and tomorrow. Although that responsibility may be unfamiliar to some, it isn't new. A knowledge of our past will help you understand.

In the beginning

The settlement of Idaho began like many other Western states. The need to explore the nation's newly acquired lands brought explorers, military scouts, trappers, and adventurers into Idaho's plains, prairies, and mountains. Their goal wasn't to settle, but to map, observe, and report back to the East on the enormity of resources that now belonged to the United States.

By 1840 early pioneers were using the Oregon Trail as a bridge to reach Oregon's lush valleys. As they moved across southern Idaho, they saw nothing but desert which they considered unsuitable for farming.

The discovery of gold in Idaho during the 1860s, however, brought thousands of miners — who needed food. So it was only natural that farmers followed them into the Territory. They started their farms and planted vegetables as close as possible to the mines — near Lewiston and in the Boise, Payette, and Weiser valleys. It wasn't long before farming, fruit raising, and livestock production were bringing more people to Idaho than the mines.

Other settlers came to Idaho in a more quiet way. In 1860 a group of Mormons began Idaho's first permanent agricultural settlement at Franklin. The pioneers introduced irrigation methods that would transform arid southern Idaho into productive agricultural land.

Suddenly, then, the gold discoveries and the march of Mormons into the valleys of eastern Idaho brought settlers to an area Congress thought would remain virtually empty of white people for years to come.

The basic Homestead Act, passed in 1862, led to the explosive agricultural settlement of the West, including Idaho. The Act allowed settlers to acquire 160 acres of land by living on it for five years and harvesting the crops they planted. The Act brought most of the early settlers to the Boise, Payette, and Cache valleys.

In 1877 Congress passed the Desert Land Act. The law increased the homesteading unit to 640 acres, but a portion of the land had to be irrigated within a specified period. Naturally, early settlers claimed most of the "easy" land close to small streams.

Pioneers began to understand the richness of Idaho's sagebrush plains and northern prairies. They were astounded when their soil produced five times as much wheat as the land they had farmed in the East. Almost overnight, horsepower cultivation of the Palouse hills changed lush grassland to black farmland.

In 1884 Congress passed the Carey Act, an irrigation law that provided for a uniform system for the use of public water in the Western states. Idaho accepted the condition of the Act in 1895 (the second state to do so) and received an allotment of two million acres of desert land to develop through large-scale irrigation projects.

The most rapid and extensive development and increase of population in Idaho's history occurred between 1900 and 1910 as a result of the Carey Act. Irrigation acreage increased from about 1,200,000 acres to nearly 2,200,000 acres.

The Carey Act gave birth to the American Falls project, Milner Dam, and Magic Valley. As dams and canals were constructed, families bought land, cleared away sagebrush, and planted crops. Towns and cities were born.

The success of Idaho's agricultural expansion, however, concealed many heartbreaking failures. Whether individual settlers were successful or not was largely a matter of chance. Some safely plowed land from sagebrush or timber and turned it into excellent farmland. Others plowed land and put it to crops for which it wasn't suited. It couldn't produce economically and withstand the ravages of soil erosion. Entire communities stand abandoned, bearing testimony to the heartbreak and despair that failures brought. Some of Idaho's ghost towns that started around

agriculture include Austin in Twin Falls County, Battle Creek and Bridgeport in Franklin County, Crawford and Roseberry in Valley County, Denver in Idaho County, Edie in Clark County, and Kimama in Lincoln County.

Then came World War I and favorable years for crop production both during and after the war. Many farmers grew more and more crops with less attention to conservation. Agriculture continued to expand, and farming methods changed quickly. Mechanization arrived in earnest, and farms grew larger.

The hard times of the 1920s, however, forced many farmers to work their land even harder. They were under economic pressure to obtain immediate cash returns to meet payments on land, machinery, and livestock. They came to accept erosion as an inherent part of farming.

Serious droughts in 1919 and 1924 also added to farmers' problems, especially those in southern Idaho. And severe drought hit the state again during the Great Depression years of the 1930s. By 1934 average water supply was only about 56 percent of normal. Crop losses were estimated at $22.4 million. Farmers were unable to pay their mortgages, much less practice conservation on their land.

The drought and poor land use practices combined to produce an Idaho dust bowl as serious as that experienced in the plains of the Midwest. Despite progress in its ability to produce, the farming system had failed to maintain its basic soil resource. Many people began to realize that soil erosion was a threat to their way of life, and conservation was essential.

Birth of an agency

In the 19th century and even earlier, some Americans were concerned about soil erosion. That concern intensified in the early 20th century.

Years of making soil surveys and viewing the effects of erosion on land in the Southeastern states prompted Hugh Hammond Bennett, a soil scientist in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to become an advocate for corrective action. He launched a crusade against soil erosion by publishing a bulletin, *Soil Erosion, A National Menace*, in 1928. The bulletin pointed out that soil erosion was of concern to the entire nation and emphasized that every aspect of life could be affected if erosion continued.

Bennett strongly supported action taken by Congress in 1928 that authorized funds for soil erosion investigations and regional soil erosion experiment stations. His views and work were well known in the political realm, so it was no surprise when he was selected to head the new program. Under his leadership, 10 erosion research stations were established between 1929 and 1931.

One of the stations, located at Washington State College at Pullman in 1930, would have a significant impact on conservation activities in Idaho. The station's job — to research ways to control soil erosion in the South Palouse River Basin.

Serious sheet and rill erosion had been observed in the Palouse region since the early 1890s. As the original grass cover yielded to the plow, soil began to erode. Summer fallow, which left the soil bare and vulnerable to erosion, had become a well-established practice on most Palouse farms.

The experiment stations measured erosion and water runoff on control plots. As erosion control techniques were developed, they were tested on farms. Effective methods were incorporated into technical recommendations and published in bulletins for farmers.

Despite these efforts, soil erosion was hardly a matter of national concern and united effort until the Great Depression of the 1930s. Then the connection between poor eroded land and poor people came into focus. New programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) were created to provide jobs in the national interest. Natural resource projects received a great deal of public support.

The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 permitted work on erosion control. To head the new work, the Secretary of Interior selected Bennett, who took charge of the Soil Erosion Service (SES) in September 1933.

Bennett launched the new SES by setting out to complete the first national soil erosion survey to get a better picture of the extent of the problem. The summary of erosion conditions in Idaho, as found by the 1934 reconnaissance erosion survey, points out the serious problems in the state:

A total of 27,207,836 acres, or 51 percent of the State, was found to have been affected by sheet erosion. Of this area, 7,267,272 acres were found to have lost generally more than three-fourths of the topsoil and on an additional area of 19,940,564 acres, the prevailing condition was a loss of one-fourth to three-fourths of the topsoil.

Gullying was extensive and occurred on nearly all of the sheet eroded lands. Severe gullying was found to prevail on 12,922,388 acres of the total area of 26,294,744 acres subjected to gullying.

Wind erosion was found to have affected 7,922,498 acres of which 620,153 acres were essentially destroyed, and 607,798 acres were severely affected.

Because of the extremely variable topography in the State, there are many different types of erosion. The natural forces of geological erosion are accelerated in the unprotected forested areas by fires and by overgrazing because of the reduction of protective vegetative cover. Uncontrolled grazing is carried on over the public domain. Attempted dry farming in some areas is now known to be futile in the lower rainfall belts.

The rolling Palouse region has undergone severe losses of surface soil, with active gully cutting, due in a large part, to the system of fallowing land for the dry farming of wheat.

Bennett located erosion control work in watersheds near the erosion research stations. Interested farmers in the watersheds could sign five-year cooperative agreements with SES to install conservation measures. Farmers supplied labor and equipment. SES furnished assistance in planning the measures, equipment, seed, seedlings, and labor through the CCC.

In 1934 the Corps established a CCC camp at Moscow on the first erosion control demonstration project in the Pacific Northwest. SES technicians fanned out into the project area to explain the new program.

The work of the SES proved successful in attracting attention from the public, as well as from farmers and their Congressmen, who sought similar projects for their counties.

In fact, the success of the Service became a point of contention between the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. They both wanted the agency in their respective departments. President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided in favor of USDA, and the SES moved to the Department on April 1, 1935.

The conservation work emerged from its temporary status to become a permanent federal agency when President Roosevelt signed the Soil and Water Conservation Act (PL 74-46) on April 27, 1935. The name had been changed from the Soil Erosion Service to the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) because an Oklahoma senator had argued that the word "erosion" had a negative connotation.

The move to centralize soil conservation work in the SCS led to a rapid increase in personnel, funds, and responsibilities.

With its multiple attack on soil erosion, the agency built up a staff of varied experts in technical fields — agronomists, engineers, soil scientists, biologists, foresters, economists, nurserymen, and hydrologists. There was also a new breed of general scientist called soil conservationist.

Upon arriving in USDA, SCS assumed supervision of Forest Service CCC camps that had been working on erosion control. Before long, more camps were added to enable the agency to extend its demonstration work.

SCS gave technical supervision to nine CCC camps in Idaho. Camp names, locations, and years of operation were:

Horseshoe Bend, Boise County — July 29, 1935 to February 23, 1938
Moscow, Latah County — May 18, 1934 to May 27, 1942

Gardena, Boise County — September 18, 1935 to October 16, 1935
Peone, Kootenai County, Worley — August 1, 1935 to July 20, 1939
Nez Perce, Nez Perce County, Genesee — November 1, 1935 to September 30, 1937
Bannock, Bannock County, Pocatello — November 18, 1935 to October 25, 1939
Black Canyon, Valley and Gem Counties, Emmett — February 24, 1938 to May 31, 1942
Weiser, Washington County — July 24, 1939 to August 15, 1941
Downey, Bannock County — October 26, 1939 to May 31, 1942

The Gardena Camp operated for only a short period of time because of budget cuts which forced its abandonment.

The CCC ended with the outbreak of World War II in 1942, but their accomplishments are long-lived. Some of their work is still visible in Idaho today.

In Gem County, CCC boys worked on reseeding rangeland, erosion control, building roads and fences, and brush planting in eroding gullies. The most visible evidence of their work today are the miles of hand-dug terraces and the introduced species of shrubs and trees.

At Pocatello, the CCC began work on flood problems in November 1935. The hills surrounding Pocatello had long been used as a trail by sheep headed for grazing on the Forest Service and General Land Office trails. The annual trek of sheep through the area depleted the grass, reducing the water-absorbing capacity of the soils. Flash flooding during thunderstorms frequently inundated parts of Pocatello.

The CCC enrollees set about hand building closely spaced contour furrows on the hills surrounding the town. They also seeded some crested wheatgrass. Another major element in the work was fencing off a lane for the sheep to pass through. The idea was to prod the sheep by the town rapidly and not allow them to graze the recovering hillsides. The native perennial grasses began to return.

After the CCC camp closed in 1939, the citizens of Pocatello continued to protect the hillside from overgrazing and participated in a coordinated fire protection program with the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and state agencies. Many of the contour furrows are still visible today.

Work by CCC enrollees allowed the SCS conservationists to experiment. Few of the techniques were new, but the trial-and-error process of fitting them together was. The work led to refinement and improvement of conservation measures still used today. A number of enrollees became SCS employees and formed the core of SCS for years to come.

The Secretary of Agriculture transferred the 10 erosion experiment stations to the SCS, as well as the nurseries for producing plant cover. Headquarters for the South Palouse erosion stations were moved to Moscow.

The Land Utilization Program, transferred to the SCS in November 1938, involved the purchase and rehabilitation of private submarginal agricultural land. The bulk of the land acquired had been purchased before the program was transferred to the SCS. The southeastern Idaho project, LU-1, involved thousands of acres in Oneida, Cassia, and Power counties that early settlers had tried to farm and then abandoned because they couldn't make a living. These lands later became the Curlew National Grasslands and a part of the National Forest system.

In 1939 an SCS nursery unit was established in Aberdeen. It was later converted to a plant materials center.

Other minor additions or subtractions were to be made in the responsibilities assigned to the SCS, but its basic function has remained unchanged. It provided for the first time a coordinated attack on soil erosion problems. Of equal importance was its ability to dramatize the effects of the Dust Bowl, giving the nation a sense of urgency and responsibility.

The call to action by SCS to save the soil as a national heritage was the most easily understood and widely accepted objective of the agricultural programs inaugurated during the 1930s. Since it stopped with people's relationship to the land and didn't become involved with the disturbing problems of prices, land ownership, or rural poverty, it could be universally accepted without controversy.

In December 1938, R. Neil Irving became State Coordinator for the SCS in Idaho with headquarters at Moscow. His title later changed to State Conservationist, and in July 1942, headquarters were moved to Boise. Irving retired in March 1959.

Other SCS State Conservationists in Idaho include Lee T. Morgan, 1959-1971; Guy W. Nutt, 1971-1975; Amos I. Garrison, Jr., 1975-1982; and Stanley N. Hobson, 1983 to present.

Organizing for action

In 1935 a new line of attack on erosion problems appeared — the idea of creating soil conservation districts.

During the Depression, leaders of the soil conservation program looked at the future of conservation and ways to establish long-range working arrangements with farmers. CCC or other government labor wouldn't be available forever. Nor was conservation a matter of simply fixing a problem. Sustained interest among farmers would have to be promoted.

The demonstration projects carried out by SCS had proven successful and effective and attracted many visitors. But many farmers weren't located in CCC or demonstration work areas. Farmers visiting the areas often left wishing for similar assistance.

USDA officials decided the soil conservation program would have to be carried out through some local group to be effective. In the long run, soil conservation couldn't succeed, they believed, unless farmers were responsible for its planning and management. Land use regulations to prevent soil from washing and blowing away couldn't be imposed from Washington, D.C. They must be adopted by local people working together to solve a common problem. And so the idea of soil conservation districts was formed.

The Secretary of Agriculture endorsed the idea and set USDA lawyers to work studying existing or needed state legislation that could be used to establish such local units. Within a few months, a model state law had been drafted. President Roosevelt sent copies of the "Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law" to state governors on February 27, 1937, urging them to adopt legislation along the lines of the standard law.

The standard law provided for the organization of soil conservation districts as governmental subdivisions of the state upon the favorable vote of the majority of land occupiers in the proposed district. Each district was to be governed by a group of five supervisors. Three were to be elected and two appointed by a state soil conservation committee. The districts were to have the authority to engage in cooperative action to combat soil erosion and prevent local misuse of land by prescribing land use regulations. These regulations had to be approved by majority vote of land occupiers in a local referendum before they could become effective.

The task of convincing the Idaho Legislature that a law authorizing the formation of districts was in the best interest of the state's soil and water resources fell to R. Neil Irving. One month after he became SCS State Coordinator, he took up residence in Boise along with the members of Idaho's 25th Legislature.

Arthur Snow, a legislator from Latah County and one of the most influential members of the legislature at the time, agreed to introduce the standard law as a bill. Although Snow had the respect and confidence of his fellow legislators, a number were bitterly opposed to it. And so were the livestock people. They saw the law as a way the government had figured out to stop their free access to public land.

Because of the opposition, Irving and a friend rewrote the bill and took out everything they thought might be objectionable. This time it was successful. The legislature passed Idaho's Soil Conservation District Law, Senate Bill 136, on March 1, 1939. Governor C.A. Bottolfsen signed the bill into law on March 9, 1939.

The law included provisions for creation of a state Soil Conservation Commission to help form and coordinate soil conservation districts. The Commission would be appointed by the Governor. The only problem was that the law didn't provide any budget to help the Commission function. That meant no office space, travel funds, or even money for stationery or stamps.

The law also established a petition and referendum procedure for formation of districts. It required a minimum of 25 names of landowners within a proposed district to file a petition with the Commission. The Commission held one or more hearings and if the district had support, conducted a referendum. All occupiers of land within the proposed district boundaries were eligible to vote. If the referendum passed by a two-thirds majority of those voting, the Commission could proceed with organization.

Not surprisingly, many of the demonstration and CCC work areas in Idaho were the first to organize districts. In the year following passage of the law, five soil conservation districts were organized: Latah, Bear Lake, Portneuf, Squaw Creek, and Mayfield (which later became Elmore).

By the end of 1947, 22 districts had organized. Ten years later, 48 districts were organized. The number of districts reached an all-time high of 55 in 1962. Through consolidations, the number reduced to 51 in 1974, where it remains today. The entire state of Idaho, with the exception of some cities and a portion of the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, is now within a conservation district.

After organizing, each district signed a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary of Agriculture to obtain USDA assistance. The district supervisors developed a conservation program that described conditions and problems affecting soil and water resources. The program also stated the district's goals and objectives and told what it would do to achieve them.

Once signed, the memorandum of understanding authorized all USDA agencies to enter into supplemental agreements with conservation districts, making the agencies' specialized assistance available to local people.

Then, as now, most USDA soil and water conservation services came from SCS. SCS usually located a field office within a district and staffed it with personnel to help plan and carry out district programs, without cost to the district.

Districts sign cooperative agreements with farmers and ranchers who want their help. The farmer/rancher agrees to prepare and follow a conservation plan for using their land within its capabilities and treating it according to its needs. Districts agree to provide technical assistance needed by cooperators to carry out their plans. Much of that help comes from SCS. But districts can and do provide help which SCS does not. Some districts have equipment that cooperators may rent. Others provide, at reduced cost, trees, grass seed, and other plant materials for conservation purposes. They help obtain services of qualified contractors and financial help from federal and state agencies.

During the past few years, several districts have changed their names from soil conservation districts to soil and water conservation districts to more adequately portray their work.

All district supervisors are now elected from within their districts. Legislation in 1973 enabled districts to expand from five to seven supervisors if they choose to do so.

The first district supervisors were virtually all farmers and ranchers. While people working in agriculture still make up most district boards, individuals who do not farm or ranch but have an interest in soil and water conservation now serve as district supervisors. It is common for people to develop an interest in leading local conservation programs after first receiving help from a conservation district on their land.

Conservation districts receive financial support from county and state governments. Annual appropriations allow districts to maintain an office and secretarial staff. District supervisors are essentially volunteers who serve without pay.

Idaho Soil Conservation Commission

After enactment of the Idaho Soil Conservation District Law by the 25th legislature in early 1939, Governor Bottolfsen appointed the first Commission members — Harold E. Nagle, a farmer at Parker; J.M. Isaacson, a rancher at Malad; and E.J. Iddings, Dean of the University of Idaho College of Agriculture at Moscow.

The Commission held its first meeting in the Governor's office on April 22, 1939, and elected Nagle as chairman, Isaacson as vice chairman, and Iddings as secretary.

R. Neil Irving, who served as advisor to the Commission, recalls the Governor appeared very surprised when he learned that no funds had been appropriated to the Commission. The governor said if he had known that, he wouldn't have appointed any Commission members.

Several inquiries regarding formation of districts had already been received from various parts of the state. During the meeting, Irving reported there was interest in the Malad and Parker areas of eastern Idaho, as well as the northern part of the state.

Early activity of the Commission centered, of course, around organizing districts. In February 1940, it adopted a four-point program for district organization:

1. County extension agents, in cooperation with the Soil Conservation Service and other agencies, will conduct educational programs to acquaint persons interested in district formation with the requirements and possibilities of such a movement.

2. Landowners will be informed of necessary legal steps required to form a district. If favorable reaction prevails, necessary committees will be named to help complete the legal procedure.

3. When districts organize, necessary surveys and other investigations and demonstrational cooperative programs will be conducted to help supervisors determine the type of program best suited to the requirement of the area and to inform landowners and other interested parties.

4. An action program, looking to the development of a comprehensive system of land use practices for the area, will be carried out as a cooperative undertaking of the supervisors, state and federal agencies.

The Commission considered petitions, held hearings, and authorized referenda for district formation. A major problem, however, was lack of funding. Commission members carried out district organization activities and attended meetings at their own expense. To offset some of their travel expenses, the Commission passed a motion in September 1941 requiring $25 be submitted with petitions for district organization.

The lack of funds also meant the Commission couldn't buy stationery or pay for postage. Irving finally bought 300 sheets of letterhead for the Commission at a cost of $12.24. At the next Commission meeting, each member reached into his pocket and pulled out $4.08 to reimburse Irving. Since most of the secretarial work involved in organizing districts was done by Irving's secretary, Evelyn Bailey, he also paid for most of the postage, but never asked to be repaid.

The Commission requested state funding to meet its operating expenses in 1944, 1949, and 1954 — with no success. Then in 1956, Irving submitted a budget request on behalf of the Commission to the legislature's Appropriations Committee for $4,589. The request resulted in an appropriation of $2,000 for the 1957-1959 bienium, the first funding ever received by the Commission. As a result, the Commission refunded donations it had received from Grover Jensen, Idaho Falls, and the Portneuf Soil and Water Conservation District for use in preparing their biennial report.

District organization progressed rapidly after passage of Idaho's law. The first districts to organize were in areas where public support and enthusiasm for soil conservation and districts were highly favorable. The remaining areas were slower to organize because of lack of information and local support. By the end of 1951, 31 districts had organized. It would take nearly 25 years to organize the remaining 20 districts.

The Commission invited leaders of the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts to meet with them in April 1952 to discuss organizing the remaining districts.

The Commission had previously adopted a policy that district formation should proceed slowly into new areas in the interest of developing sound district and conservation programs. Some district supervisors interpreted this action as the Commission "dragging its feet" in the formation of districts.

Isaacson made it clear during the meeting with district leaders that the Commission was not opposed to forming districts, but it did insist districts should start with farmers and work upwards and not be initiated from the top downward.

An era came to an end in 1955 with a complete turnover in the appointed membership of the Commission. Governor Robert E. Smylie appointed three farmers as new Commission

members: Marion Holben, Genesee; Grover Jensen, Idaho Falls; and Milton Branch, Midvale. Irving continued as advisor, along with Liter E. Spence, Extension Conservationist for the Extension Service. Commission members elected Branch as chairman and Holben as secretary.

In 1959 the legislature appropriated $32,160 to the Commission, which led them to take two major actions: hire an administrative officer and set up office space. They found an office room in the Statehouse that would be available for their use beginning July 1, 1959. The office would be equipped with legislative furniture — desk, table, and chairs — that would have to be relinquished when the legislature met again. The State Department of Agriculture, which maintained accounting for the Commission, provided office space when the Commission was forced from its legislative quarters.

The Commission authorized the use of the remaining portion of the previous appropriation, $130.70, to purchase office supplies, and asked Lee Morgan, then SCS State Conservationist, to requisition the supplies. Morgan sent his secretary, Evelyn Bailey, to the Statehouse to select them. She was rather pleased with herself when the total cost of the supplies came to $130.65. When Morgan looked at the list of supplies Bailey had purchased, he didn't even notice she had spent all but five cents. Instead, he asked her why she hadn't included a pair of scissors as part of the supplies.

The Commission solicited applications for the position of administrative officer in April 1959 and received 10 applications. At their May meeting, Commission members decided to offer the position to John (Jack) L. Fry, secretary of the Squaw Creek Soil Conservation District. Fry accepted the position at a salary of $7,200 a year and became the Commission's first full-time employee on July 1, 1959. Fry hired Mary Edmunds as the Commission's first secretary at a salary of $200 per month.

Fry served as administrative officer through June 1963. During that time, the soil conservation program took on new dimensions. The Commission became a focal point to consider problems and needs of districts. The need for state and local financial support of the conservation program became a serious agenda topic.

In 1963, the 37th legislature passed House Bill 46, which authorized (but did not require) county government to appropriate up to $1,500 per year to districts for clerical help. Governor Smylie signed the bill in March 1963. Under Fry's leadership, the Commission became a full-fledged agency of state government.

Doyle L. Scott, a Star area farmer and Chairman of the Dry Creek Soil Conservation District, succeeded Fry as administrative officer in 1963. Several important changes occurred during Scott's tenure, which lasted 16 years until his retirement in June 1979.

By the end of 1966, Idaho had 54 districts, and nearly all the private, state, and federal land in the state lay within organized district boundaries. There were about 270 district supervisors; many were brand new to the job.

The need to provide more assistance, information, and guidance to district supervisors became an increasing concern of the Commission. In 1967, the agency initiated a monthly report to keep supervisors informed of issues and activities relating to soil conservation.

The Commission also realized it needed more staff to work directly with districts and their local programs. They hired Eugene Thomas, a supervisor of the Balanced Rock Soil Conservation District in Buhl, to work part-time as a direct liaison between the Commission and districts in 1969 and 1970.

In his detailed report to the Commission in 1971, Thomas recommended a full-time staff person to work directly with districts. His work made the Commission aware of the need to provide staff assistance to districts. As a result, the legislature authorized a permanent staff position to work directly with districts in 1974.

In 1973 the Commission became an agency within the Idaho Department of Lands. Past cooperative efforts between the Department and the Commission, including the woodland forestry program, played a prevailing role in placing the Commission within the Department, where it remains today.

Accelerating soil surveys

The need to accelerate the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program, administered by the Soil Conservation Service, began to grow in the late 1960s. The demand for soil survey information increased, while the number of SCS soil scientists in Idaho decreased because of budget restraints and personnel ceilings.

Traditionally, soil surveys had been used primarily by farmers and ranchers in soil conservation districts to plan and apply conservation on their farms and ranches. But people involved in city, county, and state planning, as well as tax assessors, found they needed information about soils too, and demand for information increased dramatically.

The Commission at first considered requesting funds to accelerate the soil survey program and channeling them through the University of Idaho, which also participated in the soil survey program. They later decided to request funds from the legislature and administer the program themselves, in cooperation with SCS and the University.

The Commission submitted a soil survey proposal to the legislature with a budget request to get the program underway. Urban legislators proved to be strong supporters for accelerated soil surveys. Governor Cecil Andrus signed Senate Bill 1924, passed by the second session of the 42nd Idaho Legislature, on March 30, 1974.

The program, which began July 1, 1974, authorized the Commission to hire 10 soil scientists and assign them to SCS soil survey areas. SCS provided the office space, vehicles, equipment, training, and supervision. The University provided research and laboratory analysis of soil samples.

Based on the state's contribution to the soil survey program and the existing level of SCS soil scientists at the time, soil surveys were scheduled for completion on all state and private lands in Idaho by 1986.

The need for soil survey information increased again in 1976 when the Bureau of Land Management started writing environmental impact statements. Federal funds were transferred to the Commission to enhance survey efforts.

Dwindling state revenues, however, resulted in the legislature eliminating funds for soil scientist positions in 1982. Federal funds maintained only three soil scientists on the Commission staff. In 1983, the legislature funded two soil scientist positions, and federal funds for soil surveys all but disappeared indefinitely. An additional position, authorized by the legislature in 1985, brings the current Commission soil staffing level to three. Nearly four million acres have been surveyed by Commission-employed soil scientists since 1974.

Wayne Faude, the current state administrative officer for the Commission, started work as a Commission soil scientist and later served as resource conservationist. He succeeded Scott in 1979.

Protecting water quality

The federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 involved the Commission in one of its biggest challenges. In 1973 the Commission sponsored a Governor's Conference on Erosion and Sediment Control to discuss a model law for state water quality regulations. As a result, a joint Commission-Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts committee drafted a sediment and erosion control bill and introduced it during the 1974 legislature. Because of strong opposition, the measure died in committee. Attempts were made to introduce a modified bill to the 1976 legislature, but again opposition was strong, and the bill was never introduced.

By then the common terms "erosion and sediment control" had been replaced by new buzz words like "non-point," "208," and "water quality."

While many people thought (and perhaps hoped) the Act would fade away if ignored, the Commission recognized the serious implications of the law and the tenaciousness of its supporters — from the Administration, Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency, and many environmental interests. The Act required some form of regulatory system to ensure the goals and objectives of the 1972 Act were met. The Commission looked directly at the question facing the agricultural community and soil conservation districts: should EPA or a state agency administer a regulatory non-point source pollution control program? Or should the Commission and districts become involved, emphasizing a voluntary program?

While some agencies and individuals advised the Commission to steer clear of the water quality issue, the Commission realized water quality improvements were mandated and wanted to influence agricultural clean-up efforts in Idaho. The Commission and districts chose the voluntary approach.

Through negotiations with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's Division of Environment, responsible for all water quality programs in the state, the Commission received authority for agricultural non-point source pollution abatement planning for cropland, rangeland, and grazeable woodland in non-designated planning areas in Idaho. Eventually, all planning authority would be relinquished to the Commission, facilitating the development of a statewide agricultural water quality plan.

The Commission knew the program would never be successful, or even possible, without the involvement of districts. As a result, districts became an equal partner in developing the plan. Two very successful water quality demonstration projects in Twin Falls and Latah counties had proven the important leadership role districts could play in agricultural pollution control.

With the help of Idaho's 51 districts, the Commission developed a plan to address agricultural pollution problems. Districts identified problems associated with agriculture, helped the Commission compile a list of stream segments impacted by agriculture, and met with farmers to select best management practices that would help solve soil erosion and water pollution problems.

The Commission conducted extensive public participation activities to determine the most effective institutional arrangements for a water quality program. They selected a voluntary program carried out at the local level by districts.

In 1979 Governor John V. Evans approved the Idaho Agricultural Pollution Abatement Plan. This plan identified the Commission and districts as the water quality management agencies for agricultural water pollution control at the state and local levels, respectively.

The water quality plan recognized three essential factors for a successful voluntary program. First, farmers needed adequate technical assistance (currently provided by SCS) to identify problems and solutions; second, the public needed adequate information to recognize water quality problems and support available solutions; and third, landowners and users needed financial incentives to install best management practices.

The plan also recognized the effort couldn't be successful overnight. It established a five-year trial period for the voluntary program with annual evaluations to determine its effectiveness.

Idaho's water quality program for agriculture entered its sixth year in 1984. Annual evaluations show the voluntary program is working well. Idaho has received regional and national acclaim for its outstanding efforts by voluntarily reducing agricultural sources of water pollution.

In 1980, through efforts of the Commission and districts, the legislature modified the Idaho Code to allow use of the Water Pollution Control Account for grants to districts. Districts use the grant funds to provide technical assistance, conduct information activities, and cost-share with farmers who install best management practices in high-priority watershed project areas. The first state water quality grants were made to districts in 1981. The Division of Environment and the Commission jointly administer the Idaho Agricultural Water Quality Program.

To date, 11 projects are funded under the state Agricultural Water Quality Program and progressing well. In spite of recent economic difficulties, farmers are responding to the program. Practices they are installing in the projects include terraces, sediment ponds, grassed waterways, conservation tillage, buried pipe runoff systems, animal waste systems, and irrigation reorganization.

Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts

The job of planning, scheduling, and organizing conservation work within soil conservation districts proved to be a big one, especially since supervisors serve without pay and usually at some sacrifice to their personal business.

On top of this, supervisors soon found soil and water problems extended beyond the boundaries of their district. There were negotiations and a variety of activities with county

governments, educational agencies, governing bodies of adjoining districts, and state government.

Finally, problems or relationships at national levels of government and with national organizations led district supervisors to realize they needed an organization that could speak for numbers of districts at the state and national levels.

So it was that on March 25, 1944, supervisors of Idaho's 11 organized conservation districts met in Boise to organize the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts (IASCD). Supervisors of the Latah Soil Conservation District organized and sponsored the meeting. Clay Sutton, Midvale, was chosen as IASCD's first president, and Frank Goodwin, Sweet, as secretary.

The IASCD was incorporated under state law as a non-profit organization. It was not a unit of government as districts are.

IASCD leadership comes from a board of directors. Idaho has been divided into six geographical divisions. The districts within each division elect one supervisor to serve a two-year term on the IASCD Board of Directors. Directors serve without pay. Dues are assessed from each district to provide funds for operation of the Association.

Officers of the IASCD include a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. The president serves as advisor to the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission.

Active IASCD standing committees include District Operations; Dryland; Education; Forestry; Legislative; Plant Materials; Public Lands, Pasture and Range; Public Relations and Information; Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D); Recreation and Wildlife; Research; Resolutions; and Water Resources.

Spring and fall meetings are held in each IASCD division every year. The IASCD conducts a business meeting in the last quarter of each year in conjunction with its annual meeting, attended by district supervisors from throughout the state. During the annual meeting, policy is set and resolutions are enacted to guide future activities of the Association.

Since it organized in 1944, IASCD has supported legislation and activities which they thought would be helpful in meeting their objectives. The IASCD has also opposed legislation it believed would be detrimental.

The Association carries out a wide variety of conservation education activities as a way of securing public support for soil and water conservation. Some of its activities include sponsoring youth to attend the University of Idaho annual conservation camp, a soil judging program and contests, Soil Stewardship Week (a yearly activity with religious groups), and a statewide poster contest for elementary students.

The IASCD also encourages and cooperates in teaching soil and water conservation in public schools and encourages districts to participate in the Goodyear Awards Program, the Environmental Education Awards Program, and others.

In 1980 the IASCD hired an employee to investigate funding needs and sources for districts under a two-year project. In November 1983 the Association established an office at Meridian and hired Amos Garrison as a part-time executive assistant to the president.

The IASCD participates in the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), which serves as a national voice for conservation districts. Organized by district leaders in 1946, NACD pools district experience and develops national policies on a continuing basis. It maintains relations with organizations and governmental agencies; publishes information about districts; and works with leaders in religion, youth, agriculture, industry, and other fields.

In 1975 IASCD started publication of the *IASCD Bulletin*, a quarterly publication which gives broad coverage of district activities across the state.

Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts Auxiliary

In 1948, 13 women representing Idaho's 26 soil conservation districts organized the first auxiliary of any state association of soil conservation districts in the United States. They met November 13 at Weiser during the sixth annual meeting of the IASCD.

The idea of an auxiliary originated with SCS State Conservationist R. Neil Irving. He had noticed that wives usually attended the IASCD annual meetings with their husbands and had

nothing to do but "twiddle their thumbs." He could see they wanted to be a part of the action and that their energy and support would add a big boost to the conservation movement. And indeed, they have.

The women elected officers at their first meeting: Mrs. Glenn Henderson, Nez Perce, president, and Mrs. Aubrey Pratt, Craigmont, secretary-treasurer. Three vice presidents were selected: Mrs. Ed Adams, Jerome; Mrs. Thure Anderson, Roberts; and Mrs. Milton Branch, Midvale.

In 1949 Mrs. Henderson received an invitation to attend the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts' fourth annual meeting and take the lead in organizing a national auxiliary. Although Mrs. Henderson couldn't attend, the subject was discussed and plans were made for an organizational meeting the following year.

So it was that in February 1951, 58 women representing 24 states met to form the NACD Auxiliary. They elected Mrs. Don Fredericksen, Gooding, as president.

The IASCD Auxiliary has made outstanding contributions to soil conservation in Idaho. Members have presented soil conservation programs to Granges, women's clubs, garden clubs, youth and PTA groups. They have conducted poster contests and sponsored public speaking, essay, and window display contests. They have distributed conservation booklets and Soil Stewardship Week materials.

In 1977 they started a scholarship fund to help college students enrolled in soil conservation course work. They raise money by conducting an annual craft sale and raffle during the IASCD annual meeting.

Members of the auxiliary include spouses of regularly elected soil conservation district supervisors within the state, as well as spouses of cooperating agency personnel, such as SCS. Membership is also available to other people who are interested in soil and water conservation and who are willing to help further the principles of soil conservation districts.

The auxiliary holds it annual meeting concurrently with the annual meeting of IASCD.

Special programs

A lesson learned early in the history of soil conservation districts was the myth of boundary lines — lines that divide one farm from another, an urban area from a rural one, a county from another county, a state from another state. How one farmer manages his or her land affects the amount and kind of water and the amount of sediment that neighbors downstream must deal with. Sediment, floods, pollution, and other soil and water problems don't stop at artificial boundary lines.

Districts act as the local cooperating agency not only in carrying out the erosion control programs authorized by the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, but also in connection with programs authorized in other state and federal laws. Some laws, such as the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, specifically identify districts as the local participating agency.

Projects and programs sponsored by Idaho's soil conservation districts include the following.

Small Watershed Program

Administered by Soil Conservation Service

The trend toward more comprehensive soil and water programs involving larger areas of land and larger groups of people led in 1954 to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, Public Law 566.

The Act provides for multi-purpose projects on headwater streams for flood control and sediment reduction; water storage for municipal, agricultural, and industrial use; drainage; recreation; and fish and wildlife development. The projects combine soil and water management of lands in the watershed with dams and other structural measures. Recent projects consist mainly of planning and applying soil and water conservation practices to the land. Watershed projects sponsored by conservation districts include:

Projects Completed:
- Trail Creek, Teton SCD
- Fourth of July Creek, Kootenai SCD
- Cedar Creek, Twin Falls SCD
- Montpelier Creek, Bear Lake SCD
- Georgetown Creek, Bear Lake SCD

Projects Under Construction:
- Sublett, Power SCD
- Summit, Power, Oneida SCDs
- Roy East, Power SCD
- Hazelton Butte, North Side SCD
- Thorn Creek, Latah SCD
- Upper Sand Creek, East Side SCD
- Brundage, Adams SCD
- Big Canyon/East Fork, Power SCD

Projects Being Planned:
- Houtz/Outlet, Power SCD
- Lower Sand Creek, East Side SCD

Resource Conservation and Development Projects

Administered by Soil Conservation Service

Districts also sponsor and help carry out Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Areas authorized by the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962.

The objective of RC&D is to speed up resource conservation and development in multi-county areas as a base for urban and rural economic development. Goals include recreation; tourism; watershed protection; new industries; improved markets for crop, livestock, and forest products; and better health and community facilities such as hospitals, sewage treatment plants, schools, and roads. Conservation districts sponsor the following RC&D Areas:

Bear River RC&D Area — Bear Lake, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida SCDs
Clearwater RC&D Area — Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, Nez Perce SCDs
High Country RC&D Area — East Side, West Side, Butte, Clark, Custer, Yellowstone, Jefferson, Mud Lake, Lemhi, Madison, Teton SCDs
Idaho-Washington RC&D Area — Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai-Shoshone SCDs
Wood River RC&D Area — Blaine, Camas, Gooding, Wood River SCDs

Districts also sponsor cost-share projects within their respective RC&D areas.

Land Conversion Pilot Project

Administered by Soil Conservation Service and Conservation Districts

The Willow Creek Land Conversion Program, sponsored by the East Side Soil Conservation District, is a pilot project to field-test new ideas and approaches that can more effectively deal with persistent conservation problems. With voluntary participation of land users, the project will result in the conversion of severely eroding land to permanent vegetative cover. The project is part of program development under the Resources Conservation Act of 1977.

Rural Clean Water Program

Administered by Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service

The experimental Rock Creek Rural Clean Water Project in Twin Falls County is one of 21 in the nation. It is sponsored by Snake River and Twin Falls SCDs. Under the project, 5 to 10-year cost-share contracts are developed with farmers for installing and maintaining best management practices to control non-point source pollution and improve water quality.

208 Demonstration Projects

Administered by Idaho Soil Conservation Commission and Conservation Districts

Two water quality projects were funded with 208 monies in 1976 to demonstrate the effectiveness of best management practices on irrigated and non-irrigated cropland. The Snake River SCD sponsored the LQ Drain Irrigation Return Flow Project, and the Latah SCD sponsored the Cow Creek Palouse Erosion Control Project.

208 Water Quality Planning Projects

Administered by Idaho Soil Conservation Commission and Conservation Districts

Beginning in 1979, conservation districts used 208 grant funds to conduct detailed water quality planning on high-priority stream segments. The districts identified critical erosion sites and other pollution sources within the project areas and selected best management practices to correct the problems. They also completed cost figures on treatment needed to reduce agricultural pollution. The 208 planning projects included:

Marsh Creek, Portneuf SCD
Cedar Draw, Balanced Rock SCD
Rock Creek, Twin Falls SCD
Paradise Creek and South Fork Palouse River, Latah SCD
Hangman Creek, Benewah SCD
Lower Boise River, Canyon SCD
Willow Creek, East Side SCD
Little Malad River, Oneida SCD
Lewiston Orchards Irrigation District, Nez Perce SCD
Big Lost River, Butte SCD

Idaho Agricultural Water Quality Program

Administered by Idaho Department of Health and Welfare-Division of Environment and Idaho Soil Conservation Commission

This program provides grant funds to soil conservation districts for projects aimed at controlling agricultural non-point source water pollution. Districts use the funds for technical assistance, project administration, information activities, and cost-sharing with farmers and ranchers for installing best management practices. The districts sign 5 to 10-year contracts with farmers to ensure needed practices are installed. The Soil Conservation Service provides technical assistance for practice planning, installation and maintenance, and inspects practices annually. Projects now underway include:

Mission/Sheep Creeks, Benewah SCD
Cedar Draw, Balanced Rock SCD
Arkansas Basin, Portneuf SCD
Badger Creek, East Side SCD
Wide Hollow, Oneida SCD
Conway Gulch, Canyon SCD
South Fork Palouse River, Latah SCD
Upper Hangman Creek, Benewah SCD
Meadow Creek, East Side SCD
Lone Pine Creek, Portneuf SCD
Dairy Creek, Oneida SCD

The future

Although many people have been involved in soil and water conservation action in Idaho during the past 50 years, the job is far from finished. According to the Soil Conservation Service, additional conservation treatment is needed on about three-fourths of the total nonfederal crop, pasture, range, and forest land in the state.

Soil erosion continues to be Idaho's number one conservation problem. Some erosion from the action of water is inevitable. It becomes a threat to productivity only when the annual rate of erosion exceeds the rate at which new soil can be created. On better cropland, an annual erosion rate greater than five tons per acre is defined as "critical" because it exceeds the rate that soil can be replaced through natural processes.

According to the National Resources Inventory conducted by SCS in 1982, Idaho has three serious erosion areas.

In the Palouse region of northern Idaho, dryfarm cropland is eroding at an average annual rate of 14 tons per acre. Over eleven million tons of soil erode each year from this area. Soil productivity is lost at an average rate of two bushels of grain for each inch of soil lost by erosion. Counties with serious erosion problems include Benewah, Clearwater, Idaho, Kootenai, Latah, Lewis, and Nez Perce.

The Snake River Plain, stretching across southern Idaho, contains most of our irrigated cropland. The soils are fertile and productive, but highly erodible. Canyon, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Twin Falls counties are all losing soil at rates of 10 to 15 tons per acre each year on irrigated cropland.

In southeastern Idaho, over one million acres are eroding at an average annual rate of 14.8 tons per acre. Individual field erosion rates of 20 to 50 tons per acre per year are not uncommon. Counties with serious problems include Bannock, Bear Lake, Bonneville, Caribou, Cassia, Franklin, Fremont, Madison, Oneida, Power, and Teton.

Erosion from dry and irrigated cropland directly influences the quality of Idaho's water. Eroded soil from fields becomes unwanted sediment in ditches, canals, streams, reservoirs, rivers, and lakes. Loss of topsoil, sediment removal, and lost reservoir storage are expensive items.

Fortunately for the future of Idaho's farmland, many practical systems are available for controlling soil erosion. Various forms of conservation tillage, in which residue is left on the field, are among the most successful techniques. In one form, no-till, the land isn't even plowed. Crops are planted directly into standing residue. Conservation tillage uses less fuel and requires less time and horsepower than conventional tillage, but it requires a high level of crop management.

Soil conservation must continue as long as people engage in agriculture. It is a continual process and not a task that can someday be complete and last forever. You might think of it as a constant-care maintenance program for the land.

Conservation programs need the involvement of everyone — including those who produce our food and those who consume it. Our lives, our state's economy, and future generations depend on good, productive topsoil.

The future holds numerous and complex conservation challenges. Some are familiar; others unknown. But Idaho's active and progressive conservation districts are confident they can meet these challenges with the support and cooperation of Idaho citizens.