

Conserving the Country in Postwar America:
Federal Conservation Policy from Eisenhower to Nixon

Laura Richardson Kolar
Lake Geneva, Wisconsin

B.A., Yale University, 2001
M.A., University of Virginia, 2006

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Edel Powell
A M B
Sullivan

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the significance and changing dimensions of federal conservation policy in America after World War II. It focuses on one component of federal conservation policy: how programs developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture between 1955 and 1972 advanced new dimensions of conservation ideology and contributed to shaping and implementing broader goals of political reform. In the 1950s and 60s, leaders adapted older conservation agendas to meet the needs of postwar America, in the process shaping the direction of the nation and the ideology of conservation policy. While federal conservation policy did not hold the central place in postwar administrations that it did during Theodore or Franklin Roosevelt's time, it was a dynamic and formative force that served as a key way for policymakers in the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations to achieve reform agendas, fix multiple societal problems and to envision a better future.

The conservation policies implemented by the USDA from the mid 1950s through the early 1970s, which are the focus of this study, adapted many of the approaches of their predecessors. They also forged new policy directions: First, postwar programs focused on the multiple uses of private lands, such as farm recreation, for the first time; Second, they applied conservation practices to the challenges of urban America, seeking to shape urban-rural relationships in new ways; Third, they adopted tenets and sought to achieve goals usually attributed to environmentalism, including a desire for beauty, a high "quality of life" and harmony with the natural world.

The development of these new land uses operated within a set of cultural assumptions about the meaning and purpose of the farm and rural life at a time when more Americans than ever were migrating from farms to metropolitan areas. As a result, conservation policy in the postwar years was intimately interwoven with the evolution of modern rural development policy as it emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s, and with federal visions of what rural America should look like and the role its natural resources could play in a modern, urban nation.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and to John.

Introduction: Conserving America in the Twentieth Century

In May 1962, leaders from a variety of federal agencies and independent organizations gathered to “exchange ideas about the future course of American conservation policy.”¹ It was the first such meeting, the participants acknowledged, since President Theodore Roosevelt’s historic 1908 Governors Conference on Conservation. They recognized that their gathering shared some similarities with that conference. Many issues discussed in 1908 remained relevant in 1962, including multiple-purpose development of America’s waterways and forests, as well as the need to coordinate federal, state, and local conservation programs. But the participants also recognized important differences between the conferences: the 54 years since the 1908 meeting had witnessed remarkable changes with which any conservation agenda had to reckon. The conference attendees addressed and reflected upon the transformations in American life that called for new directions in conservation policy: a predominantly urban society and its attendant problems, a rapidly developing suburban population, exceptional demand for outdoor recreation, unprecedented agricultural abundance, an increasing reliance on scientific expertise and a new global order as a result of World War II and the Cold War.

That day, conservation leaders, such as Kennedy’s Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall and Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman, articulated new dimensions of conservation policy that they envisioned would tackle the problems of an increasingly complex, urban society and guide that society toward a better future. The conservation agenda they discussed built upon the Progressive and New Deal era

¹ “Introduction,” White House Conference on Conservation, *Official Proceedings* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1962).

foundations in conservation policy. The agenda also reflected new developments in conservation policy forged during the 1950s and 1960s. These new directions for conservation included using private, agricultural lands for multiple purposes, such as farm recreation, in order to target the problems of rural poverty, agricultural surplus and decreasing open natural space. This idea applied the wise-use ideology that had guided conservation on public lands and waterways since the turn of the century for the first time to private lands. In addition, policymakers believed conservation policy and practices should reflect growing public interest in the protection of America's natural heritage and the unprecedented desire of many Americans to experience and enjoy outdoor spaces. Finally, these leaders argued, conservation policy needed to target the issues that arose from urbanization and the waste generated by new technologies.

Unlike its more famous predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt's 1908 Governors Conference on Conservation, historians have overlooked this 1962 conference. Indeed, its low profile in the historical record is consistent with the virtual absence of conservation from historical literature on post World War II America. After World War II, traditional conservation policy, or the wise use of natural resources, drops out of the historiography. Scholarly attention turns instead to the rise of what historians term "modern environmentalism" and the problems of urban America. The 1962 White House Conference on Conservation was a call by conservation leaders to adapt conservation policy to meet the needs of the day and to forge a new and expanded natural resource agenda. The evolution of federal conservation policy after World War II is the subject of this study.

Most scholars agree that modern environmentalism indeed represented something new in American life and arose from broad changes in society after World War II, particularly the advent of widespread prosperity made possible by extraordinary economic growth, and technological innovation. These trends incited a new appreciation of natural beauty, a desire for natural amenities and an emphasis on "quality of life" that challenged traditional notions of progress. The environmental movement tackled new issues, such as pollution, species conservation and ecosystem health, and historians' emphasis on these new developments have made important contributions to our understanding of the human relationship with the natural world. The historiography has focused on what was new and different about these developments, however, at the expense of what persisted of "older" conservation traditions established at the turn of the twentieth century. As the following work demonstrates, more traditional conservation approaches adapted to the concerns and goals of the new environmental era and other movements to shape postwar American society in important ways.

Historians who have studied conservation and environmentalism have tended to depict modern environmentalism as either displacing conservation or living in tension with it. In his history of environmental politics, Samuel Hays argues that conservation gave way to environmentalism after World War II amid "rising interest in the quality of life beyond efficiency for production." For Hays, the shift from conservation to environmentalism was defined by a shift from efficiency in the development of natural resources to a focus on amenities to enhance quality of life.² Social scientist Henry P.

² Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3, 12-13. Hays associates conservation with production

Caufield marks the end of the conservation movement as 1963, when its “basic tenants were enlarged or disputed by the environmental movement.”³ This narrative about a transition from or replacement of conservation by environmentalism overlooks the reality that as environmentalism developed, so too did conservation. While the goals of each were sometimes at odds, they informed and advanced the other.⁴

and postwar environmentalism with consumption and argues that they represented two distinct phases in twentieth century American history. In his section, “From Conservation to Environment,” Hays writes: “Conservation was an aspect of the history of production that stressed efficiency, whereas environmentalism was a part of the history of consumption that stressed new aspects of the American standard of living” (13). This dissertation demonstrates that traditional wise-use conservation policies also stressed, and were shaped by, these new components of the American standard of living.

³ Henry P. Caufield, “The Conservation and Environmental Movements: An Historical Analysis,” in James P. Lester, ed., *Environmental Politics and Policy: Theories and Evidence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 15.

⁴ For key works that argue for the transition from conservation to environmentalism after World War II that this project seeks to revise, see: Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12-13; Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998), 34-36; Hal K. Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 83-4, 96, 99; Stephen Fox, *John Muir and his Legacy: The American Conservation Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981), 293, 355; and Mark W.T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), xviii. In his 2009 article exploring the opposition that developed to environmentalism, James Morton Turner acknowledges how the study of the origins of environmentalism has dominated scholarship on issues pertaining to the natural world after World War II. “To explain the genesis of the modern environmental movement in the 1960s and early 1970s, many scholars have emphasized a transition from an older generation of place-based conservation issues, such as parks, public lands, and wilderness, to a newer generation of environmental issues focused on clean air and water, toxic and hazardous waste, and other threats to human health,” he writes. This transition was important to the dynamics of the modern environmental movement, but does not explain “the organization and transformation of the environmental opposition.” Some of the most popular manifestations of environmental opposition in the 1970s, such as the western sagebrush rebellion and the wise-use movement responded not to newer environmental issues, but to changed debates over the earlier conservation issues, such as public lands and wilderness.” (James Morton Turner, “‘The Specter of Environmentalism’: Wilderness, Environmental Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right,” *The Journal of American History* 96:1 (2009): 123-148). This dissertation joins Turner’s article in moving beyond the emphasis on the origins of modern environmentalism to examine the history of traditional wise-use conservation policy after World War II.

For histories that have investigated new and more complex origins of environmentalism, including its institutional and government origins, and which have argued for a new look at conservation in what historians consider the environmentalist era, see Paul Milazzo, *Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Adam Rome, “Give Earth a Chance: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *The Journal of American History* 90:2 (2003): 525-554. Both Milazzo and Rome investigate the

Indeed, federal agencies continued to implement the conservation of natural resources based upon wise-use principles after World War II in such activities as the management of national forests by the U.S. Forest Service, dam building and game management under the Department of Interior, and soil conservation through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to name just a few examples. This dissertation is not an exhaustive study of conservation policy after World War II, and all of these initiatives and interests deserve more study. I examine one piece of this diverse postwar conservation agenda: how conservation programs developed and promoted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and applied to private lands between 1955 and 1972 advanced

institutional and government origins of environmentalism. Milazzo "recasts" the history of environmentalism by questioning the traditional narrative of its grassroots origins, citing the key role that Congress played in the development of clean water regulations, and by "emphasizing continuity in a story previously defined by change and upheaval" (249). Rome concludes that historians' "overdrawn" contrasts between the conservation and environmental movements have caused them to miss the important role of the federal government in the rise of environmentalism" (*Bulldozer*, 10). In addition, "Though the environmental movement differed in some key respects from the conservation movement, the ideas of the conservationists nevertheless shaped environmentalism through well into the 1960s" (9). He builds on this argument in his article, asserting, "Scholars have not thus far done enough to place environmentalism in the context of the times. The literature on the sixties slights the environmental movement, while the work on environmentalism neglects the political, social, and cultural history of the 1960s." He concludes that historians need to recognize the various influences on environmentalism that developed during the 1960s, including the way environmental issues became part of the broad liberal agenda of the Great Society (525, 535). The only article explicitly on federal conservation policy in the Kennedy or Johnson years is Thomas G. Smith, "John Kennedy, Stewart Udall, and New Frontier Conservation," *Pacific Historical Review* 64:3 (1995): 329-362. Smith explores Interior Department Secretary Stewart Udall's passion for conservation issues and Udall and the Department of Interior's struggles to include and adapt to growing environmental concerns. Kennedy and Udall, Smith argues, oversaw executive leadership for the traditional conservation agenda, while at the same time confronting an emerging ecological outlook that "stressed wilderness preservation, environmental protection, and the interdependence of all parts of the natural world." Both Udall and the Department of Interior during this period deserve more study.

Political histories of postwar America tend to focus, if they address these topics at all, on suburban and urban America. Little attention is given to rural America (as in, rural places where people live, as opposed to wilderness) in postwar American history. The exception to this is attention given to Appalachian poverty. Histories particularly of the 1960s that focus on the agendas of Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society (and of the two, more emphasis is placed on the Great Society) tend to focus on the problems of race, poverty and the growing urban crisis. There are good reasons for this emphasis that I will not dispute. What this dissertation aims to do is both reintroduce the importance of conservation to the environmental history narrative and post-World War II history generally, and rural America to political histories of postwar America.

new dimensions of conservation ideology and contributed to shaping and implementing the goals of broader political and government reform.

While federal conservation policy did not hold the central place in postwar administrations that it did during Theodore or Franklin Roosevelt's time, it was a dynamic and formative force in the decades after World War II. Federal conservation policy – based on a vision of conservation recast between 1955 and 1972 – became a key way for policymakers in the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations to achieve reform agendas, fix multiple societal problems and to envision and shape a better future. In the 1950s and 60s, these leaders adapted older conservation policies and programs to meet the needs of postwar America, in the process shaping the direction of the nation and the ideology of conservation policy.

This story about post World War II American conservation extends a narrative of conservation in American history that begins at the turn of the twentieth century with the creation of a national conservation movement and federal conservation policy. Spurred by concerns over the closing of the frontier and loss of unlimited resources, as well as by the growth of the bureaucratic state, government leaders established the framework of modern conservation policy under the watchful eye of President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1908). The U.S. Forest Service, established in 1905, perhaps best exemplifies Progressive era conservation. Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt's close friend and advisor, headed the Service. Its programs focused on the scientific management and sustainable use of the nation's resources, an approach based upon the ideology that natural resources ought to be developed, used in multiple ways and administered wisely

and efficiently for the sake of future generations. Replanting trees after they had been cut typified such resource management in its oversight of the timber supply and protection of renewable resources. This wise-use or utilitarian approach to natural resources guided federal conservation policy throughout the twentieth century and continues to do so today.

At the same time that Pinchot and others developed a utilitarian conservation policy, another movement emerged that was sometimes in tension with the Pinchot approach: the desire to preserve nature untouched. This preservationist ideology, rooted in nineteenth-century romantic ideals of nature, sprang from the belief that human appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature would benefit society. On a national level, this approach became embodied in the efforts of the naturalist John Muir and organizations like the Sierra Club, founded in 1892. This preservationist ideology also critically influenced the federal government's approach to managing the natural world, shaping the policies of the National Park Service and the creation of wilderness areas on federal lands.⁵ Modern environmentalism as it emerged in the 1960s and 1970s associated most with the ideology of preservation and its supporters took as their

⁵ For key literature on the early conservation movement, see Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy: the American Conservation Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1981); David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001); Donald J. Pisani, *Water and American Government: The Reclamation Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 1902-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). For a perspective that considers the important role of the market in Gifford Pinchot's political effectiveness, see Brian Balogh, "Scientific Forestry and the Roots of the Modern American State: Gifford Pinchot's Path to Progressive Reform," *Environmental History* 7:2 (2002): 198-225.

inspiration the intellectual legacy of John Muir, turning away from and at times vilifying the wise-use ideology promoted by Pinchot. This dissertation contributes to recent works that seek to explore new dimensions of conservation, preservation, modern environmentalism and their relationships to each other.⁶

As in the Progressive period, the conservation of natural resources played a central role in the history of the Great Depression and the New Deal. Conservation and natural resource programs of this period reshaped the nation's physical, cultural and economic landscapes, in the form of large dams, such as the Hoover and Grand Coulee Dams, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps and new agricultural programs such as the Soil Conservation Service. Important new scholarship has demonstrated how central conservation programs were to the New Deal political coalition and agendas, further illuminating the importance of natural resource policy during this period. As with the early conservation movement of the Progressive era, New Deal conservation directly linked the nation's natural resource management and use to its

⁶ See, for example, Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*, 4-11 and Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), vii-xii, 3-18. Because of his promotion of utilitarian conservation, Pinchot's "star fell" over the course of the 20th century, Miller argues, especially in the wake of the 1960s environmental movement, which focused on preservation and non-use. Pinchot evolved and over the course of his life created a "more inclusive vision of conservation" that included ecological perspectives (8). While the impulse to preserve nature is often cited as the dominant ideology for both the national park and federal wilderness preservation systems, Sutter demonstrates how the movement for legal wilderness protection that gained traction during the 1930s was as much motivated by the national park system's allowance of automobiles and increasing recreational use than by any traditional production-oriented use of natural resources. Recreation, particularly involving automobiles, became a "wise-use" on public lands that wilderness advocates began to oppose. In 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, designating specific areas of public lands to be "wilderness areas" where, among other restrictions, no roads were permitted. This preservationist approach differs from the preservationist approach of the National Parks, which permit automobiles and roads. Sutter illuminates important differences within preservationist ideology and policy that shape modern land-use.

progress and national viability. For New Dealers, conservation was a critical tool to reform the nation—to fix problems of the present and secure a better future.⁷

The Progressive agenda solely oversaw public lands, focusing on the natural resources to be found and used in the nation's national forests, grasslands and waterways. Progressives advocated for a multiple-use approach to these resources, arguing each resource could be utilized for different purposes simultaneously. The New Deal continued with this Progressive agenda and pushed it to new horizons in seeking solutions for the Great Depression. Policymakers in the 1930s applied conservation principles to private, agricultural lands, hoping to make suffering farm lands more productive and healthy to both bolster agricultural production and farmers' incomes. The New Deal rural conservation efforts on private lands sought to improve land-use practices for the purposes of improving traditional agriculture and rural incomes.⁸ Many, though

⁷ For recent important works on conservation and the New Deal, see Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sarah M. Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) and Henry L. Henderson and David B. Woolner, eds., *FDR and the Environment* (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2005). On the New Deal rural rehabilitation and community programs specifically, see Paul Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (New York: De Capo Press, 1976). Histories of the New Deal and the Great Depression generally mention the conservation and land-use programs of the time and their significance, though Phillips was the first author to put conservation at the center of New Deal reform and recovery efforts. The agrarian sympathies of FDR, certain New Dealers, and many Americans as well as the real and symbolic role of the farm during the Great Depression overall has been explored in the historical literature. See, for example, David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200; Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 192, 289; and Alan Brinkley, *Culture and Politics in the Great Depression* (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, 1999), 11.

⁸ Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 9.

not all, of these Progressive and New Deal conservation efforts continued into the post-World War II years, both on public and agricultural lands.⁹

My story picks up after World War II, and I explore key continuities of traditional conservation policy, as well as new dimensions of conservation policy that emerged after the war. New circumstances after World War II, including the growth of suburbs, increased urbanization, the rise of large-scale agriculture, an outdoor recreation boom, the

⁹ Many of the more radical and reform-oriented U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, such as the rural relocation and community programs administered through the Farm Security Administration, were dismantled during World War II never to be resurrected. Conflict over the direction and goals of agricultural and rural policy pulsed at the heart of the USDA during the New Deal years. For an account of the conflicts over farm policy during the New Deal within the USDA see Richard S. Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966). For an explanation for why certain programs continued and others failed, see Kirkendall, Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 11, 41, 195, 222, 237; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 449, 469; Paul Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, and Grant McConnell, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 93-96.

Robert M. Collins further explores the pivotal role of WWII in shaping twentieth century liberalism in *More: the Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). He argues that the war resolved the "ambivalence" of the Depression, tipping the balance away from the economics of scarcity and toward economic expansion. Liberals planned for an extension of the New Deal based on economic growth, creating what Collins terms "growth liberalism," (15, 40). Not only was growth in production important, but growth in consumption was critical to this ideology of growth after World War II. Elizabeth Cohen explores the implications of America's growth in consumption in *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

This context of policymakers' commitment to economic growth, abundance and consumption is key for understanding the world in which postwar conservation operated and for understanding the kinds of reforms that it promoted. Postwar conservation reflected postwar growth liberalism's desire to move beyond the New Deal's insurance of the "basics" of living toward achieving a higher standard of living, and its commitment above all else to the growth of the economy. The remarkable affluence of the postwar years, and liberals' beliefs that the market and economic growth could provide security and relieve poverty, in many scholars' estimations, critically shaped, and marked the bounds and limits of, postwar liberal reform. See, for example, Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127-8; and Gregory S. Wilson, *Communities Left Behind: the Area Redevelopment Administration, 1945-1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), xv. The Area Redevelopment Administration's history served as a "microcosm of the limitations of reform in postwar America," Wilson concludes (xv). "In the end, the nation's commitment to market capitalism outweighed its concern for the system's negative effects, which contained regional as well as class, racial and gendered dimensions...the history of the ARA shows the deep reverence for, and failure to adequately address, the power and influence of the corporation within American political culture," (152). Both Schulman and Wilson criticize the public policy approach of "area" or "regional" development of the 1950s and 1960s, arguing that it prioritized sections over people.

development of new infrastructure, such as highways, and the rise of environmentalism created new challenges that required not only the older traditions, but new conservation approaches and guidance. National conservation leaders paid homage to the Progressive and New Deal roots of conservation and, just as New Dealers had adapted Progressive conservation to meet the demands of the time, began to adapt conservation to the new challenges of postwar America. At the White House Conference on Conservation in 1962, Stewart Udall, President Kennedy's Interior Secretary, declared the issues of 1962 America required "new programs" and a "bold forward thrust to meet the demands of tomorrow." A "new effort of Rooseveltian proportions" was needed, he argued, "if we are to secure an adequate resource base for the future, and plan the use of our land resources so that material progress and the creation of a life-giving environment will go hand in hand."¹⁰ At this May 1962 conference, leaders reframed American conservation, introducing new ideas and solutions, because, as Udall admonished, national circumstances demanded them.

Orville Freeman, Kennedy's Secretary of Agriculture, led the way. While other federal agencies oversaw important conservation agendas during the 1950s and 1960s, most notably the Interior Department under Stewart Udall, this project focuses on the ways that Freeman's U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) revolutionized conservation policy to address widespread and fundamental problems in both rural and urban America.¹¹ Indeed, Freeman's personal conviction that conservation programs

¹⁰ *Official Proceedings*, 7-8.

¹¹ Thomas G. Smith explores Udall's role in the direction of natural resources during the Kennedy administration. As Interior Secretary, Udall was central to supporting and passing important conservation and environmental measures, such as the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Land and Conservation Fund Act

could successfully address multiple societal problems and affect rural, suburban and urban Americans was one of the most important factors in shaping the nature of postwar conservation policy. Freeman argued for a conservation agenda that pushed for new uses of private, agricultural lands and a re-conceptualization of rural America's place and purpose in modern American society. While he acknowledged that great advancements in conservation had occurred, he believed America's rural, private lands—three-quarters of the nation's land resources outside Alaska—presented the next great conservation challenge and opportunity.

This private lands conservation agenda had its immediate roots in the mid 1950s with the first postwar USDA Rural Development Program. The program, while small, marked the first federal effort to recognize the changing needs, uses and role of rural America's resources after World War II as well as the realities of extensive rural poverty. It laid the foundation for the 1960s USDA Rural Areas Development (RAD) program that sought not only to address rural poverty and farm problems, such as farm surplus, but also suburban and urban issues. Under Secretary Freeman's tenure, rural development and conservation took on a more prominent role, addressing key goals of Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society.

Postwar federal conservation policy both built upon and diverged from the conservation legacy of the first half of the twentieth century. The conservation policies implemented by the USDA from the mid 1950s through the early 1970s adapted many of

of 1965. He worked closely with Freeman, even though his Department mainly oversaw public lands. In 1963, Udall's bestselling book on conservation issues, *The Quiet Crisis*, was published with a forward from President Kennedy (*The Quiet Crisis* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963]). Freeman was not the only architect of postwar conservation policy and more study of Udall and his contributions to postwar conservation policy is warranted.

the approaches of their predecessors but also forged new directions in conservation policy. USDA conservation policy diverged in three ways: First, it focused on applying the multiple-use doctrine to private lands for the first time; Second, it applied conservation practices to the challenges of urban America, seeking to guide new urban-rural relationships; Third, it adopted tenets and sought to achieve goals usually attributed to environmentalism, including a desire for beauty, a high "quality of life" and harmony with the natural world. I will expand on these three points below.

First, the USDA focused innovative energies on the adaptation of the multiple-use of natural resources doctrine to private lands. The USDA pursued this adaptation to achieve the following goals: to raise small farm income, provide more outdoor recreation space for urban and suburban dwellers, support the small family farm and reduce damaging agricultural overproduction. Freeman and his advisors implemented a land-use adjustment program that encouraged family farmers to convert part of their working farms to farm recreation and other conservation uses, such as wildlife and watershed protection. Farmlands could be used for many purposes simultaneously—uses that were still compatible with traditional agriculture. Central to the land-use adjustment agenda was the belief that fewer and fewer agricultural acres would be needed to produce traditional agricultural goods and that those acres should be adjusted to better serve the wellbeing of all Americans.¹²

¹² This postwar context of overproduction and abundance in agriculture was critical to shaping the dimensions of USDA postwar conservation, which was designed in part as a solution to commercial agriculture's problems and excesses. This paradigm would shift in the early 1970s to a scarcity model in agriculture and concerns over having enough farmland and food production.

While New Deal conservation had addressed agricultural lands, its efforts focused on improving traditional agricultural practices. Postwar conservation programs expanded the meaning of "agriculture" by advocating new "crops" for the farm, such as golf, fishing, swimming and hiking. In 1962, the USDA began providing institutional and financial support for farmers to develop those uses through loans, grants and technical assistance. The developers of the farm recreation program anticipated that these new "crops" would increase the incomes of struggling farm families, conserve precious (and threatened) open space and reduce damaging surplus. Congress authorized this land-use adjustment agenda and codified the multiple-use agenda for private lands in the 1962 Food and Agricultural Act, which created a federal farm recreation program among other programs.

Second, postwar conservation policies consciously targeted the problems of an increasingly urban society, attempting to guide natural resource use in order to address rapidly changing relationships between rural and urban America. Federal conservation policy and rural development initiatives attempted to address rural, suburban and urban needs simultaneously in the formulation of natural resource policies. The belief that rural and urban America's fates were intertwined and that rural America had a critical role to play in society beyond food production drove USDA postwar conservation.¹³ So, too, did the conviction that natural resource conservation measures needed to be developed with the problems of America's cities in mind. When Orville Freeman talked of expanding

¹³ Laurance S. Rockefeller, chair of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC), which is explored in Chapters 2 and 3, reflected on the fortieth anniversary of the ORRRC's final report, published in 1962. The report represented a "new approach to conservation—that the problems and opportunities were not all in the countryside, but that urban needs were important as well" ("From the ORRRC Chairman," *Parks & Recreation* 37:1 (2002): 85).

and changing the uses of America's farmlands, he was not thinking only of benefits for rural people, but of the USDA's growing urban and suburban constituency.¹⁴

The new dimensions of conservation policy that emerged after World War II were in part an effort by the USDA to remain relevant and adapt to the needs of an urban age. They also reflected the reality that more and more Americans wanted to vacation in rural areas and experience the rural outdoors through recreation, particularly in open spaces near metropolitan centers where the majority of Americans lived. In ever increasing numbers after World War II, Americans wanted to spend time outside, consuming not just goods from the farm but the agrarian experience itself. The USDA wanted farmers to capitalize on this growing market through new conservation measures.¹⁵ These USDA conservation efforts under Freeman influenced President Lyndon Johnson's "new conservation," which he introduced in the fall of 1964—a conservation to meet the needs and problems of the time, including those of America's cities, and to craft the "good life" and the Great Society for all Americans.

USDA postwar conservation agendas accepted that America was an urban nation by 1960, but did not assume this reality was (a) ideal or (b) the inevitable future state of

¹⁴ The city-country relationship has been a rich subject of historical scholarship, ranging from William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992) to histories of the turn of the twentieth century Country Life Movement (William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* [Port Washington, N.Y., Kennikat Press, 1974]) to explorations of suburbia and New Deal greenbelt communities.

¹⁵ Another dimension of the USDA's adaptation to urbanization and to new connections between rural and urban America was the food assistance programs, such as food stamps, that developed during the 1960s. These targeted another set of urban needs and were also part of a long legacy of attempting to deal with mounting agricultural surpluses. Within months of taking office, Freeman and his advisor Willard Cochrane established the Food Stamp Program in its modern form. The program grew steadily during the 1960s and ballooned under Nixon. By the late 1990s, with an annual budget of \$25 billion, the Food Stamp Program constituted the largest single program administered by the USDA (Richard A. Levins, *Willard Cochrane and the American Family Farm* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000], 52-54).

the country. By the mid-to-late 1960s, as America's cities began to explode into violent riots, Freeman and sympathetic journalists began to question the assumption that the United States would or should remain a predominantly urban nation. They contended that conserving rural America's natural resources, heritage and physical space would solve the growing crisis in America's cities, avert what leaders believed was a devastating rural-urban imbalance and provide critical living space for the future.

Johnson, Freeman, and others argued that having 70 percent of Americans crowded onto one percent of the nation's land contributed to the explosive urban crisis and the solution to the problem lay in rural America's open space and resources.

They further argued that federal conservation and rural development programs needed to be continued and expanded to build a vibrant rural America rich enough with opportunity to maintain residents and even attract migrants from cities. Freeman and his advisors, along with other federal leaders, proposed a solution toward this end in 1967. The Department of Agriculture argued for the creation of new communities: the "Communities of Tomorrow." These small, planned cities were to be scattered around the countryside and designed to provide both rural and urban amenities. The Communities of Tomorrow would combine, for example, the pleasantness of rural, natural space with the cultural and entertainment benefits of living in a metropolitan area, as well as access to good medical facilities and higher education. All of these institutions would be developed in clusters around these small cities. Like many national planning visions over the course of American history, the Communities of Tomorrow never fully materialized, though the USDA implemented aspects of the vision piecemeal and on

smaller scales. One way the Department implemented its Communities of Tomorrow vision was through Resource, Conservation and Development districts, multi-county conservation planning districts that could span as many as a million acres, authorized in the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act.

Thus, it is important to note that postwar conservation policy shared deep connections with its Progressive and New Deal predecessors in prizing the values, physical space and culture of rural America above urban areas, and continuing to argue that national welfare depended upon rural welfare.¹⁶ In this way, postwar conservation promoted longstanding agrarian fundamentalist and utopian ideals that had been present from the founding of the country. But, at the same time, it had evolved to become more urban-focused than its Progressive and New Deal predecessors and to shape the city-country relationship in new ways.

Third, USDA postwar conservation ideology, while adhering always to traditional wise-use ideology, was influenced by ideas, values and concerns usually attributed to environmentalism by historians. Leaders sought to use conservation practices to achieve environmental benefits. These values and benefits, such as, beauty, harmony, interdependence and preservation, influenced the policies and direction of

¹⁶ The rural welfare as essential to national welfare argument has deep historic roots and was present at the founding of the United States, particularly in the ideas of Thomas Jefferson who admired farmers and rural communities and despised metropolitan centers, such as those in Britain. As America began to urbanize and centralize, it had the potential to resemble the rotted and corrupt mother country, a fear Jefferson held deeply. This conception of rural America's relation to national welfare, sometimes called rural fundamentalism, agrarianism or agrarian ideology, continued to be an influential force in the twentieth century, shaping turn of the century conservation and New Deal land and agricultural policy not to mention its deep cultural sway. For an interesting perspective on early republic ideas of political economy, especially as they related to agriculture, see Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). For insight into Jefferson's conception of nationhood, see Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

postwar conservation. In particular, USDA conservation programs were concerned with the beauty of the agrarian landscape. The USDA cited over and over in promotional literature on farm recreation that maintaining the beauty of the countryside was key to establishing successful farm recreation businesses and new "crops," which would then in turn conserve the agrarian countryside. The goals of conservation in this case were not the traditional ones, such as production of traditional agricultural goods, like corn, or soil health. Rather, they focused on urban and suburban visitors' desires to enjoy the leisure and recreational work on a beautiful farm. There these visitors hoped to find peace and harmony with the natural world and to experience pleasant rural amenities, like berry picking, porch-sitting and pastoral beauty. This type of scene resonated with aspects of the growing environmental movement, particularly its middle-class, suburban and open space components that historians are now exploring.¹⁷

In contrast to the Progressive and New Deal eras, which focused on public lands and traditional agricultural development, postwar conservation ideology viewed agricultural lands as critical parts of America's outdoor and natural heritage, equally as important to American culture as national forests and parks. In the late 1950s and 1960s, agricultural lands joined pristine natural areas as places that deserved federal aid for protection. Furthermore, implementing new federal conservation practices aimed at sustaining the beauty of the countryside and farmland for the purposes of direct consumption, key USDA officials argued, would enhance opportunities in rural

¹⁷ See, for example, Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*.

communities, uplift rural and urban people alike and advance the “good life” central to 1960s liberal reform.

Policymakers forged these three new dimensions of conservation policy to improve American society, guide and manage massive transformations and achieve broader postwar federal administration goals. As was the case with conservation in the first half of the twentieth century, postwar conservation policy leaders and policymakers used conservation as a tool to reform society. Postwar conservation programs sought to resolve inequities, eradicate poverty, preserve beautiful natural spaces and agrarian heritage, provide new economic opportunities, stabilize the agricultural economy and achieve balance between urban and rural America.

These goals expanded in scope over time, from targeting the problems of farmers, including poverty, and rural communities in the late 1950s to more forcefully attacking poverty and addressing outdoor recreation concerns in the early 1960s to, more broadly, addressing diverse issues in all American communities, including cities, by the late 1960s. After President Kennedy’s death, Freeman and the USDA’s conservation efforts intensified with the emergence of the War on Poverty and Johnson’s broader vision of the Great Society. Johnson wanted to surpass not only the New Deal in his conservation agenda but Kennedy as well.¹⁸ A great society was one where humans could renew their contact with nature, live in harmonious, beautiful communities, expand their minds and live up to their potential. It was a “place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness,” a place where “the city of man

¹⁸ Rome, “Give Earth a Chance,” 525, 535.

serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community,” declared Johnson in his Great Society speech in May of 1964.¹⁹ Conservation programs targeted this broad, ambitious vision of liberal reform, seeking ways to transcend being just a rich and productive society to becoming a great one, as Johnson called for in that May 1964 speech.

Concern over rural-urban imbalance and the belief that conservation and rural development policy had the potential to resolve the urban crisis continued from the Johnson administration into the Nixon years. In this latter administration, these concerns informed the creation of the nation’s fundamental rural development legislation, the Rural Development Act of 1972, as well as Nixon administration rural development and conservation policy. It is important to note that conservation comprised part of larger rural development agendas in postwar America that sought to improve education, health and other community resources and which culminated in this 1972 Act.

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While the desire to improve society and shape a better future motivated USDA postwar conservation policy, these aims were in tension with competing USDA agendas, a contradiction the USDA never publicly acknowledged or resolved. On the one hand, USDA postwar conservation policy sought to assist struggling small farms and preserve the traditional agrarian landscape through innovating new land-uses, promoting beauty

¹⁹ Lyndon Johnson, “Great Society Speech,” May 1964, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Book 1, 1963-4* (Washington, DC: GPO), 704-7.

and by improving incomes. It pursued innovation in order to secure a future that would preserve a sense of the past. In a related goal, it also sought to stem, or ideally, reverse the rural to urban migration tide that USDA and other leaders argued contributed to urban overcrowding, violence and rural decline.

On the other hand, the USDA supported the development of large-scale, industrialized agriculture and agribusiness to the tune of billions of dollars a year through subsidies and research programs—programs that pushed smaller farmers out of business, restricted opportunity in rural areas and encouraged rural to urban migration. The USDA sought, through its conservation programs, to fix some of the very problems it created through other farm programs. Journalists in postwar America pointed this connection out on multiple occasions. But the USDA publicly supported both its commercial agriculture programs and its rural development and conservation agendas even as they at times worked against each other.

This fundamental tension in agricultural policy—attempting to support the viability of small-scale agriculture and retain a long-standing agrarian heritage while simultaneously pushing efficiency and large-scale production—plagued the entire twentieth-century and was especially pronounced in New Deal policies. By the 1950s it had become a classic example of one generation's solution becoming another's problem. Since the turn of the century, the USDA had funded scientific research and programs to increase productivity and modernization on America's farms in the effort to become more efficient and to support farmers, as well as provide lower food prices for consumers. Since the 1920s America's farmers had been producing too much and agricultural surplus

was wreaking havoc on the agricultural economy, a problem that was widely discussed in the two decades after World War II. At the same time, the productivity of America's farms was touted as a national success story, especially as it created the most abundant and cheapest food in the world, a critical selling point in the Cold War contest.

These values collided on the land. Competing and sometimes incompatible values—capitalist production, efficiency, modernization, beauty and heritage—shaped postwar conservation policy. The postwar conservation agenda supported large-scale agriculture while actively attempting to conserve the small-scale, diversified farm and its attendant agrarian heritage, progressively adjusting land-use toward environmentalist values and amenities and targeting the needs of all Americans, including those in urban and suburban communities. Ultimately, the Department of Agriculture charted an alternative course for agricultural America through its new conservation measures starting in the mid 1950s. These measures coexisted with and even sought to improve dominant trends in commercial agriculture but did not fundamentally challenge these prevailing forces.²⁰ Postwar conservation policy reflected the ambivalence and uncertainty policymakers felt about the trends in modern American agriculture during the middle decades of the twentieth century and over how best to guide the nation.

Other factors were at play in the process of adapting conservation programs to meet the needs of post World War II America. The USDA was losing clout on Capitol Hill as more Americans left the farm, leaving the Department seeking ways to remain

²⁰ Again, it is important to mention here that this alternative vision coming out of the USDA worked within the context of a dominant economic growth paradigm that fundamentally shaped postwar liberal reform. This dominant economic growth paradigm, supported by members of Congress and the executive branch, supported the development of large-scale, production-oriented agriculture.

relevant to a broader constituency beyond that of the four percent of Americans who farmed by 1970. The enormous rural out-migration to America's cities after World War II and two Supreme Court decisions in 1964 that decided "one man, one vote," tying Congressional representation and electoral votes to population rather than geography eroded the USDA's constituency.²¹ These developments swung the political balance of power toward metropolitan areas, in particular suburbia, and away from rural America. They encouraged savvy administrators and their Congressional supporters to search for constituencies among those who drove Volkswagens in the countryside and to target issues that mattered to those people. All the while, though, commercial agriculture as a business interest retained its support in the halls of Congress.²²

During the two decades after World War II, agriculture became just one component of a changing rural America that the USDA had both helped to create and sought to guide in new directions. During his tenure under Kennedy and Johnson, Freeman frequently advocated that the USDA change its name from the Department of Agriculture to some iteration of the Department of Rural Affairs in order to reflect its

²¹ These Supreme Court cases were *Wesberry vs. Sanders*, 376 U.S. (1) 1964 and *Reynolds vs. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 1964.

²² In 1960, farmers represented just 8.3 percent of the U.S. population, a number that had fallen from 12.2 percent in 1950 and which would fall to 4.4 percent by 1970, while 30 percent of Americans still lived in rural areas. Rural America and agricultural America were no longer the same. The fact that commercial farm interests in Congress remained strong (and continue to remain strong) affected a tiny percentage of people. By 1990, farmers represented 2.6 percent of the American population ("A History of American Agriculture," *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture* [North Logan, UT: Letter Press Software, Inc.]), http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/timeline/farmers_land.htm). Geographer Edward Higbee commented in his 1963 work, *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1963), despite the fact that the number of farms and rural populations were declining, agricultural interests had long managed to maintain their influence in the nation's legislative halls (118).

changing purpose and constituency.²³ Though he did not succeed in changing the USDA's name, the rural development efforts of the 1960s did pave the way for making rural development a fundamental mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1970s.

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Updating the history of conservation policy in the immediate decades after World War II revises the narrative of post-World War II America and contributes to painting a fuller picture of this period. We find that the relationship between rural America and administration agendas, particularly liberal reform ones, such as Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society, were not just about the problems of poverty or large-scale agriculture, but also about quality of life, American identity, and the values of beauty, long-term balance and national sustainability. Rural America did not just serve as a passive backdrop to an urbanizing nation or an incidental place for food production after World War II. It was an active ground for change and reform—a place of past importance and future potential, a place policymakers believed was essential for preserving key elements of America's heritage and character, achieving the good life, sustaining a high standard of living and making the Great Society. It was a place to live and to grow, as the 1963 *Yearbook of Agriculture, A Place to Live*, proclaimed.²⁴

²³ As mentioned before, the Food Stamp program was one way the USDA adapted to urbanization and attempted to solve modern agriculture's problems. In addition, the Extension Service began to attend to suburban constituents on unprecedented levels, giving advice on lawns and backyard gardens and on suburban expansion, another example of adaptation and redirecting of resources on the part of the USDA.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *A Place to Live: The 1963 Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1963).

Nor was conservation replaced, or simply displaced, by environmentalism. As the USDA conservation agenda demonstrates, traditional conservation policy broadened to encompass and target emerging environmental values, such as beauty, balance and interconnectedness, while remaining true to the traditional ideology of the wise use of natural resources. Further, postwar conservation adapted traditional conservation approaches, such as the multiple-use of natural resources, to address needs of the time on private lands.

Ultimately, in their quest to achieve a sustainable and harmonious landscape that re-imagined urban and rural communities and proved compatible with large-scale agriculture, USDA postwar conservation plans were not wholly successful. But USDA postwar conservation programs reshaped conservation ideology, taking it in new directions that were codified in legislation and programs. Conservation practices began to target environmental benefits and amenities such as beauty, for example, goals that continue to drive agricultural conservation policies. Agricultural conservation policy's goals and targets expanded over the years that this dissertation traces, and this expansion is the main focus of this study.

It is important to note that USDA postwar conservation programs had a significant material impact on the rural landscape and rural communities, reshaping millions of acres, setting aside private agricultural lands for long-term wildlife conservation and multiple-use watershed purposes and converting others to golf courses, hiking and riding trails and vacation centers all over the country. For example, by May 1968, more than one million acres of privately held farmland had been opened up for

public recreational use under the Cropland Adjustment Program authorized in 1962. By January 1, 1967, the Farmers Home Administration had made 953 rural recreation loans for a total of \$43.5 million for projects spanning 49 states and Puerto Rico, demonstrating the national reach of the programs. Between 1962 and 1967, the Soil Conservation Service helped 34,700 rural landowners and operators establish one or more income-producing recreation enterprises on their land. Between 1963 and 1968, 1500 new recreation centers in rural communities had been built thanks to the new USDA programs. By December 1968, the Resource Conservation and Development districts, also authorized in 1962, spanned 52 projects, located in 39 states over 293 counties, 169 million acres and affecting the lives of 8 million people. New USDA postwar conservation programs tacked out an agricultural landscape, which did not accomplish all the goals policymakers hoped the programs would, but which made their mark both on people and the land nonetheless.

Perhaps more fundamentally, when it comes to American identity, the tensions and visions that informed postwar conservation policy remain with us. Postwar conservation raised enduring questions about what the "good life" really is, how it is to be achieved, and what role the natural world should play in it. It attempted to improve the fortunes of the individual at the same time that it sought to serve the common good. At the end of the day, as West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Gus Douglass admonished in 1969, Americans facing down the final decades of the twentieth century needed to think about what kind of future they wanted and how the nation's resources should be *used* to craft that future.

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I explore the themes and ideas discussed above in a narrative that traces the national trajectory of key conservation programs beginning in the mid-1950s through the early 1970s, while also grounding them in local contexts and case studies. Chapter one explores the 1950s origins of postwar conservation in the USDA Rural Development Program. This program, created in 1955, addressed widespread rural poverty, sought to diversify the rural economy, and aimed to ameliorate the negative effects of large-scale mechanized agriculture on rural communities. Its director, True D. Morse, recognized the vast changes occurring in the American countryside, citing the emergence of what he termed a "New Rural America," and advocating that leaders adjust federal farm, conservation and land-use programs to address the emergence of new needs and facilitate new industries beyond agriculture in rural areas.

By the late 1950s, the Rural Development Program had taken notice of the explosion of outdoor recreation's popularity among the American public and Congressional concerns over lack of outdoor space to meet the growing demand. The program proposed adjusting America's farmlands to meet those outdoor recreation needs. The Rural Development Program was small and limited in scope and funding and did not stem the tide of agribusiness or large-scale agriculture, fix rural poverty or change the landscape of outdoor recreation. But it did lay the foundation for subsequent programs in

the sixties that reshaped conservation policy and influenced broad administration agendas.

Chapter two explores the development and implementation of federal conservation policy under President Kennedy's Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman. I investigate the ways that policymakers in the USDA envisioned using private land conservation and land-use measures to guide American development and address multiple problems. I then focus on one aspect of this conservation agenda as a case study: the creation and implementation of federal farm recreation programs authorized in the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act.

The next chapter builds on chapter two, exploring USDA conservation policy's role in Johnson's War on Poverty and the Great Society, including Johnson's "new conservation." Land-use adjustment and conservation remained a central part of the Rural Areas Development agenda that USDA policymakers directed toward the ambitious goals of eradicating poverty, enhancing natural beauty and achieving the elusive good life. Ultimately, President Johnson, Freeman and others saw rural America's resources and viability as fundamentally linked to the fate of urban America, and I trace how conservation became a tool to reform all parts of the nation.

Chapter four investigates what I term the "rural-urban imbalance crisis" that Johnson, Freeman, journalists and scholars saw developing in the mid-to-late 1960s. These leaders believed this crisis arose from too many Americans leaving rural communities and crowding into cities, causing unrest and decline most visibly seen in urban riots. Rural revitalization and increasing opportunities in rural America became

framed as a critical solution to the urban crisis. Within this context, which was part of a general sense of crisis across the nation in the late 1960s, conservation took on new urgency. Rural America and its vast land resources became a key player in the Great Society drama, that harmonious, egalitarian script that was only partially enacted.

The USDA under Freeman advocated for an expanded purview to more adequately address the rural-urban imbalance crisis. Postwar conservation expanded to include not only reform-minded land-use programs, like farm recreation, but also new types of American communities as a solution to urban and rural America's woes. Communities of Tomorrow were one solution. In addition, Freeman became a powerful voice in the federal government for national planning, arguing it was essential to solving the imbalance crisis and preventing the nation from heading down a "suicide path." This chapter also addresses resistance, mainly from national journalists, to Freeman and the USDA's conceptualization of the urban crisis and its solutions. *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, argued that if the USDA really wanted to address rural decline and urban woes, it needed to fundamentally change its farm subsidy programs, stop paying large farmers to grow and throw more support to the very small-scale farmers the Department purported to support.²⁵

Chapter five traces postwar conservation policy into the Nixon years, exploring how concern over rural-urban imbalance influenced Nixon administration conservation policies and spurred bi-partisan Congressional action. Many of the ideas, programs and policies of the previous decade and a half informed the creation of the nation's

²⁵ "Keeping Them Down on the Farm," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 1972.

fundamental rural development legislation, the 1972 Rural Development Act, and were reauthorized in Farmers Home Administration legislation.

By the mid-1970s, however, the motivations—rural poverty, loss of outdoor recreation space, agricultural surplus, the urban crisis, rural-urban imbalance and the vision of the Great Society—that spurred the new dimensions of postwar conservation either continued without resolution or faded as other issues took center stage. With the global economic crisis of 1973-74 and economic hard times, Americans no longer focused on what to do with excess leisure time outside, worrying instead about how to find enough work to pay the bills. Environmental concerns shifted from focusing on the preservation of outdoor space and outdoor recreation to human health, the reduction of toxins and ecological wellbeing. In the agricultural world, the focus shifted from a surplus crisis to a potential food scarcity crisis, prompting Nixon's Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz to lift production controls and declare that farmers plant "fencerow to fencerow."²⁶

The conclusion brings the story of postwar conservation ideology to the present and discusses the longer-term significance of the story. Postwar conservation ideology and the programs it produced did not succeed in resolving one of the classic tensions in American culture—the often fierce attachment to the past and dedication to tradition

²⁶ Critiques of the modern agricultural system have been building over the past decade. A movement toward more a more localized, sustainable agricultural system has sprung up in many corners of the country in the form of farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), local food hubs and university gardens. Thanks to bestsellers such as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006), the 1970s and Earl Butz's decision to increase production are widely seen as the turning point when America chose the unsustainable path of industrial agriculture. In truth, Butz was continuing down a path that agriculture was already firmly on. If anything, the 1950s might be called the critical decade for the entrenchment of the modern agricultural system. Interwoven with the call for agricultural reform today is a call for food reform in the wake of growing obesity and other related health problems.

pitted against the nation's obsession with innovation and notions of progress. Although postwar conservation programs did not succeed in resolving this tension, those who advocated for it to meet postwar needs attempted to do so and in the process conservation policy made its mark on American communities and land.

Chapter 1: Grappling with Progress: The 1950s Roots of a New Federal Conservation Agenda

Introduction

This chapter explores the foundation for the 1960s federal conservation agenda that emerged in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. I focus on two key developments during the 1950s that linked rural and urban America and formed the foundation of the above agenda: 1) the growth of federally subsidized agribusiness and the problems it created, such as rural poverty, rural economic transformation and rural migration to cities; and 2) the growing popularity of outdoor recreation. These trends influenced federal policymakers as they sought to guide the use of rural America's natural resources after World War II.

One way policymakers sought to shape the future of the American countryside was through the nation's first federal postwar rural development program within the USDA. This program sought to address widespread rural poverty, diversify the rural economy, support small-scale farmers and ameliorate the negative effects of large-scale mechanized agriculture on rural communities and populations. While the Rural Development Program was small, especially in comparison to the farm programs supporting large-scale commercial agriculture, the issues it targeted and its recognition of a changing rural and agricultural America established an important precedent. The program was the first federal effort to recognize the changing needs for, uses and role of rural America's resources, including farms themselves, after World War II.

Ultimately these rural and agricultural programs under the USDA Rural Development Program did not stem the tide of agribusiness or large-scale agriculture,

reverse the rural migration to the cities, fix rural poverty or fundamentally alter the use of rural America's natural resources. But, they did lay the foundation for subsequent programs and shape the conservation and rural development visions of the 1960s.

Productivity and Prosperity: The Post-World War II Context

To understand the federal conservation agenda promoted by the USDA during the 1960s, it is critical to understand the broader context in which this agenda developed. The USDA agenda was born out of broader trends in American life after World War II. These included unprecedented productivity and widespread prosperity; the development of an "advanced consumer economy," in historian Samuel Hays' words, accompanied by an assumed rise in leisure time and decrease in working hours; increased outdoor recreation and a shift from a production-oriented economy to a consumption-based one; the rise of large-scale agriculture and agribusiness; a massive migration from rural areas to urban ones and an overall increased interest in "quality of life" issues. The dominant postwar political culture "stressed economic growth rather than redistribution, consensus rather than conflict." Prosperity was the main goal for policymakers, and liberals, influenced by the dynamics of the developing Cold War, "sought to demonstrate the superiority—economic, political and spiritual—of democratic capitalism to total communism."¹ Indeed, the pursuit of economic growth was a "central and defining

¹ Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127-8. The advancing Cold War "shifted the economic program of American liberalism to the right." One of most influential intellectuals among policymakers was Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. who argued for "vigilance against communism and the Soviet Union and support for democracy through economic aid," writes

feature of U.S. public policy,” in the years after World War II, vitally shaping liberal policymaking and broader American culture and life.²

Particularly relevant to the USDA conservation reform agenda of the 1960s within this broader postwar context were the transformations in agriculture and rural life that occurred in the 1950s. While trends toward fewer and larger farms, rural migration to cities and technological advancements in farming had been occurring since the turn of the twentieth century, these developments intensified during and after World War II for a number of reasons. The war years saw record setting productivity from America's farms in an effort to meet war demands, much of it made possible by a technical and scientific revolution that fundamentally transformed agricultural and rural life in the decades after World War II.³ Advancements in farm equipment, innovations in plant and animal development, such as hybrid seeds, improved farm management practices and the widespread use of pesticides and fertilizers resulted in greater production out of fewer

Gregory S. Wilson in *Communities Left Behind: The Area Redevelopment Administration, 1945-1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 25.

² Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), x. Collins argues that the pursuit of economic growth became an ideology that fundamentally shaped liberal politics after World War II. World War II resolved the ambivalence of New Deal growth policies, which emphasized balance and security, by tipping the balance toward economic expansion. “Liberals planned for a further extension of the New Deal, based on economic growth instead of balance and security” (15). The “interpenetration of growth politics and liberal politics” produced what Collins terms “growth liberalism”—a key driver of the development of the Great Society (69, 51). Postwar liberals saw growth as “the vehicle for transformative social change” (235) and as such growth liberalism reached its “full ascendancy” during the 1960s (234). The rising concerns over quality of life and the health of the broader environment introduced interesting dimensions into growth ideology during the 1960s: “the concern with quality represented growth liberalism at its richest and most complex. The desire to use economic growth to transcend economic growth was as noble as it was chimerical, and the attention to growth's environmental consequences was as responsible as it was ironic” (66). Ultimately, growth liberalism was eclipsed during the 1970s with the end of the postwar boom and the emergence of economic stagnation, inflation and “widespread pessimism” (98). The ten years after 1969, writes Collins, were a “time of diminished confidence and capabilities” (100).

³ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 232.

acres, required fewer people to work in agriculture, and helped to consolidate larger farms. The increased use of tractors during the war years, for example, contributed to these trends. In 1939, there were 1.445 million tractors on American farms, or two for every nine farms. By 1945, there were 2.354 million tractors in use: two for every five farms.⁴ Chemicals developed for war use, such as DDT, an insecticide, and 2,4-D, an herbicide, became widely available to farmers to use after the war. Production and use of insecticides increased over 50 percent during the war, and the use of such chemicals in agricultural industry would only increase into the postwar years.⁵

At the same time that farm production increased, average farm sizes also increased during the war and would only continue to grow in the postwar years. Walter Wilcox, an agricultural economist at the University of Wisconsin, concluded in his work on the farmer during World War II that the war sped up farm enlargement, contributing to a trend of both smaller and larger unit farms growing in number while the number of moderate-sized farms declined.⁶ The average farm size grew from 213 acres in 1950 to 297 acres and growing in 1960.⁷ Between those same years, the number of farms fell from 5.4 million to 3.9 million—in contrast with the high mark of approximately 6.8

⁴ Danbom, *Born*, 236.

⁵ Walter Wilcox, *The Farmer in the Second World War* (Ames, IA: The Iowa State College Press, 1947), 57. See also Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals, from World War I to Silent Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Russell explores how World War I spurred scientists to adapt chemicals like insecticides that had been developed for agriculture to human warfare and thereafter how the civilian and military development of chemicals influenced each other. He demonstrates how the United States, in mobilizing for World War II, “linked military and civilian institutions, developed new chemical technology to control insects and people, and joined chemical warfare and pest control on rhetorical, institutional, and technological levels” (14). DDT, for example, was a chemical designed for warfare and after the war ended, industrial scientists marketed the “new wonder insecticide DDT” for civilian agricultural use (14).

⁶ Wilcox, *Farmer*, 303, 305.

⁷ *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture* (North Logan, UT: Letter Press Software, Inc.), Lesson 3, http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/classroom/index_inst.htm.

million farms in 1935.⁸ These shifts would have profound effects on the people who lived and worked on the land as the farm population also declined. During and after the war, many people left the countryside in search of work opportunities in America's burgeoning cities and manufacturing sectors. Between January 1940 and January 1945, approximately five million people left farms for other opportunities, a decline of 17 percent of the total farm population.⁹ Between 1950 and 1960, this trend accelerated as the farm population declined from 25 million to 15.6 million. Others who did not migrate to cities turned to part time farming and sought off-farm work, a trend that would increase in the 1950s and 1960s.

These transformations were not simply a result of technological and scientific advancements. The push toward fewer farms and increased mechanization and industrialization in agriculture was not inevitable, but rather the result of choices made within a dominant economic and political framework that prioritized increased production and incomes and low prices for consumers. That framework also embraced science and technology.¹⁰ Indeed, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's policies and programs, through its vast extension system, support of land-grant universities and in the bureaucracy itself, supported and funded scientists, engineers, machinery developers and chemical companies who all sought to make agriculture more efficient and productive. The USDA urged farmers to "modernize"—to use hybrid seeds, tractors and chemical

⁸ Cochrane and Runge, *Reforming Farm Policy: Toward a National Agenda* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1992), 94.

⁹ Wilcox, *Farmer*, 98.

¹⁰ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 101. "Dry statistics mask the role of powerful government and business agents in fomenting the depopulation and industrialization of the postwar countryside, as if the process were the product of inevitable technological forces or of the 'logic of industrial capitalism.'"

pesticides. In addition, the federal subsidy and commodity programs established by the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act tended to reward larger landowners, contributing to the consolidation of land and wealth into fewer hands and the move toward monocropping.

As the years after World War II unfolded, it became clear that the “farm problem” that plagued the agricultural industry was overproduction—an ironic problem that arose from researchers’ and policymakers’ attempts to produce more and more from every acre. President Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson and his supporters believed the farm problem was an “issue to be confronted through abundant marketing” rather than the planned scarcity that New Deal price support and production control measures attempted to create.¹¹ The problem, in other words, that they perceived was underconsumption and not overproduction. Benson desired to abolish the price support system established during the New Deal, a highly controversial position that Congress did not enact. Benson found opposition to his proposals in a Congress dominated by strong farming interests and legislators bent on maintaining the New Deal safety net for farmers. Many southern, midwestern and western members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, were uncomfortable slashing payments to farmers who voted for them and as a result Congress refused to overhaul the crop subsidy program. Benson’s attempts to do just that made him widely unpopular with farmers and even among Republicans who backed the majority of President Eisenhower’s pro-business policies.¹²

¹¹ Hamilton, *Trucking*, 115.

¹² Hamilton, *Trucking*, 113.

Despite failure to reform farm policy in his favor, Benson proved critical to the growth of agribusiness, throwing USDA support to the food and processing industries that arose between the farmers' fields and the consumer's mouth and ushering in an "era of corporate-dominated agribusiness."¹³ Central to the ideology of agribusiness was a commitment to low prices for consumers. Within this environment, farmers who tilled smaller, more diverse acreages struggled to keep pace, and many of them were forced out of farming during the 1950s.¹⁴ As corporate, mechanized agriculture took firm hold, many farmers intensely felt the cost-price squeeze as investments in farming grew ever more expensive and they received low returns. Particularly hard hit were farmers on

¹³ Hamilton, *Trucking*, 113.

¹⁴ Nowhere were these transformations more pronounced than in the American South, which had a largely rural population. Historian Pete Daniel argues that the transformation from the older agricultural cultures to a more "rationalized and businesslike way of farming" was forced, over time "by mechanization and government policy" and resulted in the displacement of millions of farmers from the land (*Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985], xi, xiv). Daniel holds the New Deal years responsible for creating a new agriculture based "more upon capital, government programs, technology, and science than upon sharecroppers, tenants and the community" (90). In Daniel's analysis, the AAA "undermined small-scale agriculture with policies that benefited primarily landowners." Radio programs, the extension service and other methods of USDA outreach all pushed modernization and mechanization. Daniel concludes his book with the "triumph of capitalist agriculture," a system forged by government policy, mechanization, science. World War II only accelerated the changes already underway during the Depression (237). "Instead of visionary programs," he concludes, "USDA policy is trapped in the original nineteenth-century premise of modernization. The complexity of modern agriculture with its intricate financing, gigantic implements, prescription fertilizer and chemicals, numerous federal programs, and frequent bankruptcies calls into question the notion of progress" (295). One of Daniel's final messages is that the modern system of agriculture was not the only path that could have been taken: "larger farms, mammoth implements, killer chemicals, and government intrusion were not inevitable" (296).

In his work specifically on the American South during the 1950s, Daniel further explores the effects of government policy and mechanization on agriculture in the region (*Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000]). "Washington bureaucrats and lobbyists in the 1950s advised farmers to embrace science and technology, to get big or get out. Machines and chemicals destroyed jobs, reconfigured the landscape and undermined the environment." Indeed, the numbers told a story of dramatic change: 11 million southern sharecroppers, tenants and small farmers left the land the two decades after World War II (1). This displacement continued beyond the 1950s as the 3 million farms in the American South in 1940 fell to 1.2 million farms in 1970, and tenants fell from 1.5 million to 136,000 in the same period. What had begun as an emergency measure passed in the 1930s to help farmers, the farm program now had "metamorphosed into a vast system that subsidized farmers, bureaucrats, processors, experiment stations, and agricultural schools. The USDA had become an unwieldy bureaucracy that cultivated a wide band of support by dispensing favors to contradictory interests" (50).

small and medium-sized farms, and as they left farming, the rural landscape and culture changed—looking more and more like Benson’s vision of the countryside as one populated by large-scale industrial, pro-corporate farmers.¹⁵ Certainly the problems of American agriculture during the 1950s were not new, but they intensified during the 1950s, and the decade was pivotal for entrenching our modern system of agriculture and agribusiness.¹⁶

The changes coursing through agricultural and rural America during the postwar years elicited both celebration and concern. On the one hand, the developments marked significant progress, the unprecedented productivity a miracle and boon to both the United States and the world. The advancements made in agriculture would give consumers low prices, help to feed a hungry world and serve to create a better, safer tomorrow, particularly in the dangerous world of the Cold War. On the other hand, some

¹⁵ Hamilton, *Trucking*, 118.

¹⁶ Tensions and frustrations in agriculture ran high during these years. In October 1957, in what became known as the “South Dakota incident”, debate over the farm problem moved into a different arena than discourse and discussion. As Secretary Benson stood on stage in front of 7500 people to celebrate the National Corn Picking contest, eggs flew through the air in his direction (he was not hit; they landed on the stage). Some South Dakota farmers felt they had failed to get “satisfaction from letters they wrote Benson” and “decided to lob eggs on him.” In a telegram following the incident, a farmer wrote to Benson, saying, “I’m sure that every farmer there wanted to throw eggs at you but only five had the nerve. You will get it more often hereafter.” U.S. Representative from South Dakota, George McGovern, (D-SD) also attending the National Corn Picking contest, remarked that while he and Senator Stuart Symington (D-MO) did not agree with Secretary Benson’s policies, “we much prefer to debate rather than throw eggs or anything else.” The Department of Agriculture responded, stating that the egg throwing incident had “served to focus public attention on the farm problem” and will “cause the public generally to re-examine the farm program with a view to helping bring forth something better than the hodge-podge legislation which grew out of depression and war.” Certainly as a demonstration of discontent, the egg throwing incident was mild in comparison with other demonstrations in American and world history. It did, however, illustrate the tensions coursing through agricultural America in the postwar years. (*The Daily Plainsman*, Huron, South Dakota, October 6, 1957; Telegram from Hugoton, Kansas, October 11, 1957, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, Record Group 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture [hereafter cited as NA RG 16], Box 2994, Folder “Public Relations 4-1—South Dakota Incident, Oct 1-24”; USDA response, 31 October 1957; letter to Mrs. White from Robert D. McMillen, Assistant to the Secretary, 25 October 1957, NA RG 16, Box 2994, Folder “Public Relations 4-1—South Dakota Incident, Oct 25-”).

Americans worried over the fate of rural America and the family farm in light of the trends and transformations in agriculture. Progress had a dark side.

The fate of the family farm and rural America was a hot topic in the postwar years—one, admittedly, that often got expressed yet did little to stop the dominant trends discussed above. President Truman's Secretary of Agriculture, Charles F. Brannan, for example, voiced his worries over the direction of American agricultural development and policy. Unlike Benson, Brannan was a New Deal supporter, having worked to implement New Deal programs. During the Depression he had been a lawyer with the Resettlement Administration, helping to relocate Dust Bowl families, and during World War II, he had worked for the Farm Security Administration, the Resettlement Administration's successor. This background was reflected in his approach to federal farm policy. He wanted to protect the family farm concept—an institution he saw as essential to American life and democracy.

Under the leadership of Secretary Brannan, the Truman administration attempted to confront the nature of price supports and fundamentally reform farm policy. In what became known as the "Brannan Plan," the administration proposed ending the New Deal program of propping up farm income by restricting production and providing price supports based on the number of units of a specific commodity produced. Instead, the federal government needed to guarantee incomes—ie, providing income subsidies instead of commodity subsidies. The Brannan Plan advocated that the market determine prices and growers receive income subsidies if total earnings fell below the parity level established. Large producers preferred the price supports to direct payments and the plan

failed when Republicans, supported by farm interests like the Farm Bureau, and southern Democrats who opposed the civil rights agenda of the Truman administration, combined to defeat the proposal in Congress in 1949. The failure of the Brannan Plan closed the window on what historian Virgil Dean perceived to be a “golden opportunity” to fundamentally reform farm policy and possibly slow the trend toward ever-larger farms.¹⁷

After this defeat, Brannan continued to express his concerns over the direction of American agriculture and did not give up his efforts to ensure federal farm policy favored the family farm concept. Per his decision, the USDA underwent a comprehensive policy review in 1951 to find out how well the programs of the Department of Agriculture were serving family farmers, and how they could be improved to better “protect and preserve the traditional pattern of family farming.”¹⁸ Brannan thought it necessary to appraise federal services to the family farm, because, he believed “through all the pressures of mobilization and stepped-up production, we must safeguard the traditional family-farm principle as a valuable American institution.”¹⁹ Echoing many others throughout

¹⁷ The most in-depth discussion of the Brannan Plan and farm politics generally at this time is Virgil W. Dean, *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006). This attempt to fundamentally reform federal farm policy is generally conceived of as the moment when it most likely could have happened. With the Brannan Plan’s defeat, the nation “missed a golden opportunity to effect a major and much needed change in U.S. agricultural policy,” writes Dean, and the concepts debated “remained at the heart of the farm policy debate for most of the next half century” (xi).

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Summary of the Family Farm Policy Review* (Washington, DC: GPO, September 1952), 1.

¹⁹ Ibid. Brannan linked the family farm’s significance to the new global order of the Cold War, declaring “our family farm pattern is a world symbol of democracy on the land. It is America’s answer to communism’s false propaganda among the underprivileged rural peoples of other countries...the American family farm pattern is one of the Nation’s main exhibits in the world struggle for men’s minds and one of the examples we hold out for all the world to see. We seek to extend the benefits and advantages of our system to rural populations elsewhere. To be successful in this, we should make sure that our own pattern is the best possible one...If democracy is to be a continuing source of hope to rural people elsewhere in the world, democracy must continue to advance in rural America.” This kind of rhetoric would continue into the 1960s.

American history, Brannan declared that "the family farm has always been the backbone of our democracy" and in the face of increasing communist threats, rural America had to be strong and held up as an example to rural peoples in the world. In another expression of concern over the fate of the family farm and rural American communities, U.S. Representative George McGovern (D-SD) stated before Congress in 1957 that "one of the most alarming developments in recent American history is the accelerated deterioration of the family farming units of our Nation. The replacement of family-size farms with huge corporation style farm operations," he continued, "is not only undercutting the opportunities for young Americans to make their livelihoods in agriculture, but it is a direct threat to the continuance of our rural communities with their schools, churches, and commercial life." Ultimately, McGovern concluded, "when scores of farm families are replaced by one factory-type operation, we have actually set the stage for a kind of modern day feudalism with the remaining farmers playing the role of serfs."²⁰

While the exact definition of a "family farm" remained up for grabs, and the state of its demise debated, the fact remained that changes in American agriculture transformed the American countryside after World War II on an unprecedented scale. Farms grew larger and more mechanized, small farmers struggled and rural poverty remained a problem, even as the postwar economic recovery obscured at the national level many of rural America's problems.²¹ The federal government did little to address

²⁰ "Preserving the Family Farm as a Way of Life," *The Congressional Record*, 18 February 1957.

²¹ Dennis Roth, "True D. Morse and the Beginnings of Post-War Rural Development Work," *Federal Rural Development Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2002), 1. http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/rural_development_policy.html.

the plight of small farmers and rural poverty in the immediate postwar years; only a handful of policymakers gave those issues attention. Secretary Brannan was one of them, arguing for an expanded role for the Farmer Home Administration (FHA), the successor agency to the New Deal era Farm Security Administration. "I have been convinced for a long time that we need a much bigger Farmers Home Administration program to assist families on inadequate units to improve and enlarge their farms and to change their systems of farming," Brannan wrote in 1952.²²

After World War II, however, the emphasis of federal policy and business was not on helping families on inadequate farms to improve their practices and remain on their farms. The mandate for certain New Deal reforms, which had sought to do that, had disappeared during World War II. The agrarian thrust of certain New Deal reformers, mainly in the Farm Security Administration, and the attendant federal and state commitment to support those who wished to stay in farming, even if that meant subsistence farming, did not motivate policymakers in postwar America. That agrarian moment, as Sarah Phillips and others argue, closed as wartime expansion and economic gains "empowered efforts to undermine production restrictions, conservation controls and

It was not just poverty in rural America that was obscured, but poverty everywhere. Historian Thomas Sugrue points out in his work on postwar Detroit that "the United States at mid-century was a far more complicated and troubled place than emerges from most histories and popular accounts. The nation was at a peak of economic and global strength in the 1940s and 1950s. America's aggregate rate of economic growth was nothing short of stunning." Yet at the same time, Sugrue demonstrates that the "celebration of affluence masked significant regional variations and persistent inequality" across America. Many lived below the "façade of postwar prosperity" (*The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996], 6).

²² Charles Brannan to J.S. Russell, 8 August 1952, NA RG 16, Box 2077, Folder, "Farming 2, Family Farming."

rural rehabilitation programs.”²³ Soil conservation efforts promoted by the Soil Conservation Service and the Extension Service shifted from combating rural poverty, improving marginal lands and focusing on the longer term maintenance of soil resources for the use of future generations to promoting ultimate production capability and boosting crop yields.²⁴

By the mid 1950s, however, federal policymakers realized something had to be done to guide the rapid and wrenching changes in agricultural and rural life, and particularly for struggling farm families and withering rural communities. The federal rural development program that developed under the Eisenhower administration beginning in 1955 adhered to the priorities of postwar economic growth and supported the development of an industrialized countryside and viable alternatives to agriculture. It

²³ Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 222. Wartime gains pushed liberals toward an “alternative prescription for rural poverty: full employment,” writes Phillips. “New industry, they believed, could provide jobs and high wages; industrial expansion would underpin rural prosperity.” The demise of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) beginning in 1943 with slashed appropriations and concluding in 1946 when it was officially dismantled and replaced by the Farmers Home Administration (FHA), signified the decline of the agrarian influence on New Deal rural, conservation and agricultural policy. The New Deal programs to assist the rural poor and marginal farmers, such as rural rehabilitation communities, and the application of soil conservation practices to marginal farmlands were easy targets for an increasing conservative opposition to the New Deal that consolidated in the late 1930s; these rural programs also challenged the major powers in agriculture. FSA assistance to tenants and sharecroppers in the South, for example, threatened larger landowners and businessmen who liked the control they had over the availability of labor, and bankers and processors viewed the FSA’s loan programs as competition. The “representatives of the large commercial farmers provided the most effective opposition” to the FSA writes Richard S. Kirkendall in *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (115). These tensions were expressed within the USDA itself, between the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, which supported larger, commercial farmers and their interests and the FSA; there was, as Kirkendall writes, “much talk of conflict between the objectives of the two agencies” (90). The Farm Bureau combined with the anti-New Deal conservative coalition in Congress to defeat the FSA and the FHA permitted to continue what was considered the acceptable work of the FSA: the tenant purchase program, water facilities program and loan and credit programs to low-income farmers. Any programs suggesting communal work, or the support of subsistence farming were eliminated. Grant McConnell remarked cynically about the creation of the Farmers Home Administration: “Such is the resolution of the problem of rural poverty” in *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1953), 111. Ultimately, in his estimation, the dilemma of the FSA “was that it had to administer a welfare program within the framework of agricultural policy. In this it never succeeded” (96).

²⁴ Wilcox, *Farmer*, 106-08.

reflected a fundamental principle of American economic policy from the 1940s through the 1970s—the belief that “only sustained economic growth could relieve poverty” and strong economic growth was a “prerequisite for social security or economic justice.”²⁵

Indeed, the main goal of the federal Rural Development Program was to improve the economic viability of depressed rural areas by diversifying economic opportunity to increase the incomes of the people who lived there—even if that meant encouraging those who remained in farming to leave farming, or converting agricultural lands to other economic purposes, like rural industry. The focus, as the program began, was on farmers, but it was not an agrarian policy devoted to keeping farmers on the land at all costs as some New Deal policies had sought to do. At the same time, the new program emphasized improved land-use techniques, and off-farm work as a supplement to farmers, in this way echoing approaches used in New Deal rural policy.

Ultimately the federal Rural Development Program remained limited and under-resourced, making no real dent in the dominant trends of American agriculture during the 1950s. The program worked within the framework of a developing large-scale agriculture and agribusiness instead of reforming it. As just one indicator of this reality, Don Paarlberg, head of the task force that formed the program, pointed out that the Rural Development Program’s yearly cost to the federal government (\$2.7 million) approximately equaled the daily cost of storing and managing the \$9 billion surplus of farm products.²⁶

²⁵ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 198, 207.

²⁶ Don Paarlberg, “Rural Development Achievements and Shortcomings as Seen at the Federal Level,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 43: 5 (1961): 1515.

On the other hand, Paarlberg believed that the program had brought out into the open problems that had previously been "glossed over" by society, including the existence of widespread rural poverty, poor utilization of rural America's resources and the failure of price-support programs to help the small operator.²⁷ The problems could not be dealt with effectively, he believed, until they were recognized and understood. The creation of the Rural Development Program thus revealed a sense on the part of certain leaders and policymakers that while the industrial farm model appeared to be successful beyond imagination, the model had real negative consequences and contained fundamentally contradictory implications that had to be addressed before they became overwhelming and explosive.

Furthermore, the federal Rural Development Program of the 1950s laid the foundation for rural development policy during the 1960s. It is important to recognize that it developed amidst other changes in American life, including a rising societal interest in outdoor recreation, the preservation of open spaces and stirrings of environmentalist concern with natural beauty. In addition to commercial agriculture, these trends also affected the issues the Rural Development Program sought to address and the solutions it envisioned for the rural landscape and rural people. The program helped to lay the groundwork for a federal conservation and rural development agenda in the 1960s that sought to find new uses for and approaches to agrarian America in an effort to deal with the transformations in the American countryside, problems in America's cities and to craft a more balanced society.

²⁷ Ibid, 1512.

The 1950s Federal Rural Development Program and a "New Rural America"

In January of 1954, President Eisenhower addressed Congress on the subject of small farm families and their need for special assistance in the midst of agriculture's transformations. He recognized in his address that the USDA's price support policies only benefited some farmers, and that other measures were needed for the millions of people in agriculture who did not fare as well: "the chief beneficiaries of our price-support policies have been the two million larger highly mechanized farming units which produce about 85 percent of our agricultural output. . . . Special attention should be given to the problems peculiar to small farmers."²⁸ The fact that in 1950, about 1.5 million farm families made less than \$1000 a year revealed a serious problem in American life.²⁹ Eisenhower submitted recommendations to Congress for a program focusing on small farmers' problems and a task force was established to study the problems of agricultural poverty and low-income farmers. This task force formed the foundation of the first federal attempt at rural development in the postwar period.

Secretary Benson appointed True D. Morse, a man with rural development experience, to direct efforts toward America's smaller farms. Morse had directed the Doane Agricultural Service, a private firm out of St. Louis, Missouri, which gave

²⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Progress in the Rural Development Program: First Annual Report of the Secretary of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: GPO, September 1956).

²⁹ Statistic derived from *Farms and Farm People*, A Special Cooperative Report, U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Agriculture (Washington, DC: GPO, June 1953).

planning assistance to individual farms during the 1930s and 1940s.³⁰ Morse anticipated drastic changes would affect agriculture after the war and believed small and low-income farms needed special attention because the price support and other commodity programs did not fit these farmers' needs. He also recognized that as the American economy grew and agriculture transformed, nonagricultural industry might increase in rural areas.

Like Brannan, Morse believed that support of small family farms was essential for American culture and society because these farms still served as the "backbone of the nation" and stood as a "bulwark" against those who aimed to destroy the American way of life.³¹ In the context of the Cold War, Americans had to win the bottom line of productivity, and multibillion dollar subsidies helped to achieve that goal. But the United States was also competing with the Soviet Union on more than the economic front; the Cold War was a battle for values as well. In this cultural battle, the Jeffersonian ideal of the democratic, independent family farmer played an important role as a symbol of American identity and greatness—one that Morse's program attempted to sustain as more than just an ideal, but a reality updated for modern times.

In 1955, the task force called for by President Eisenhower provided recommendations for the development of a program aimed at the problems of rural poverty.³² Its final report emphasized its focus on farm people, while at the same time

³⁰ Roth, "True D. Morse," 1. The Doane Agricultural Service drew "detailed maps, analyzed soils and productivity, investigated local markets and community structures, and then produced a farm management plan."

³¹ True D. Morse, "Agricultural Problems—as Seen From Washington," *Journal of Farm Economics* 35: 5 (1953): 665.

³² U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Development of Agriculture's Human Resources: A Report on Problems of Low-Income Farmers* (Washington, DC: GPO, April 1955). The various organizations did not all agree in their recommendations to the USDA regarding the creation of a rural development program

directed at the problems of low-income farmers, and their responses created an insightful dialogue. Certain groups, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the National Farmers Union (NFU) critiqued federal farm policy, arguing that too much of the agricultural legislation and USDA activities were of major benefit to only the owners and operators of large farms. "We are not convinced that it is socially desirable for the majority of the nation's farmers to transfer to industrial employment or to abandon their farms for employment by major farm operators. We do not believe that the trend which has been toward large-scale highly mechanized farming unites in the United States is a healthy development," wrote the AFL. It called for a renewal of New Deal style programs that worked toward "rehabilitating the underemployed rural people." The AFL also critiqued the Extension Service for devoting too much of its assistance to the two million "large, highly mechanized" farm units and helping to increase their production and not paying enough attention to the problems of small farmers. It suggested that the Extension program redirect its resources to help the other 3.5 million farmers better use land and human resources instead of forcing them to leave agriculture. One must read the AFL's response with an eye to the AFL's interests, which was protecting its laborers; the flood of rural migrants to cities directly competed with urban labor. (The American Federation of Labor to Secretary Benson, 19 August 1954, NA RG 16, Box 2417, Folder "Farming 2 Family, Aug. 27 to (2 of 2)").

In line with its historic support of small farms, the NFU also criticized the USDA's general thrust toward supporting larger, commercial farms and wrote that it was "deeply concerned about the problem of poverty or near poverty on a large number of family-type farms." It called for Secretary Benson and his staff to "redirect the policies of the Department of Agriculture toward strengthening and developing the small family farmer," which it saw as the best means of strengthening and developing the family farm. It also opposed what it perceived to be the curtailment of the Farmers Home Administration (FHA). "In all frankness," wrote James Patton, head of the NFU, "I must say. . .that the current drift of the farm policies of the Executive Branch of the Federal government is in the direction of an increased percentage of tenancy, concentration of farm land ownership and control, continued poverty for the already unfortunate and imposed poverty for those in the middle income brackets who up to now have been able to earn relatively adequate incomes for their farms." (The National Farmers Union to Secretary Benson, 28 July 1954, NA RG 16, Box 2418, Folder "Farming 2 Family, Jan. 1 to Aug. 2"). During World War II, Patton had expressed astonishment and dismay before a congressional committee at the growing case against the Farm Security Administration, arguing that the agency would serve a valuable role in the prosecution of total war. He supported the committee's goal of reducing nonessential federal expenditures, but believed the federal expenditures to be reduced or eliminated were not those of the FSA, but the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) subsidies: "We feel that a review of agricultural funds is desirable. We have long felt that AAA subsidies are unnecessary for larger farms." In an articulation of ideas that would reemerge in the 1960s as part of the rural and agricultural agenda of Johnson's Great Society, Patton argued that the "parity concept for agriculture must not be limited to parity of price, but must include parity of interest rate, parity of credit availability, parity of income, parity of living standards, and parity of opportunity for the 50 percent of farm families who now get only 10 percent of agriculture's total income" (*Report of Proceedings*, Joint Committee of Nonessential Federal Expenditures, National Agricultural Library [hereafter cited as NAL], USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-15, Folder, "VIB2b(2) Farm Security"). This concept of "parity of opportunity" for rural America would become a central part of Johnson's 1965 message on agriculture and War on Poverty in rural areas.

In contrast, the Farm Bureau, in line with its historical ideology, told the Department of Agriculture in 1954 to be wary of promoting more programs to help struggling farmers to stay in agriculture. "One of the things we need to avoid in our approach to this problem," wrote Allen B. Kline, Farm Bureau President, "is development of programs which insure continuing poverty." He supported the migration of rural people to cities: "Our cities and their industries have been built to a large degree, by people who moved from the farms to the cities as increasing agricultural productivity made it possible for a smaller proportion of our population to supply the total need for agricultural products. There is no reason why this process cannot be expected to continue for some time in the future." (Farm Bureau to Secretary Benson, 29 July 1954, NA, RG 16, Box 2417, Folder, "Farming 2 Family, Aug. 3 to Aug. 26"). Others

acknowledging it did not address the problems of migratory agricultural workers.³³ The principal cause for low incomes in farming, the report concluded, had nothing to do with inadequacies in the people themselves, such as lack of work ethic, but rather “inadequate” agricultural resources. The solutions to these problems the nation confronted would need to be “broadly formulated” with attention to resolutions that rested outside of commercial agriculture. The authors of the report expected to see continued movement of many farm people into nonfarm occupations.³⁴

The Report also reflected President Eisenhower’s predilection for federalism, which sought to channel power to states and local governments.³⁵ The rural development program would be driven by local desires and needs and guided by the people themselves, as opposed to the federal government: “this study emphasizes that the foundation for programs to increase opportunities available to low-income people is the

agreed with the Farm Bureau, including the Dean of the University of West Virginia College of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics, H.R. Varney who did not see how price support programs could help the majority of West Virginia farmers, who farmed small acreages. He agreed, at least in terms of West Virginia’s situation, that there were too many farmers for too few land resources and the only solution was for the “surplus population” to find nonfarm employment over a period of time. In terms of a new federal program, Varney believed it should be dominated by “special measures to improve and assist the economic mobility” of poor farmers, in particular West Virginia farmers. To address farm population immobility, he advocated training programs through institutions like the 4-H that focused on improving the nonfarm skills of rural people. This move to nonfarm employment, ideally within the native state, was central to the federal rural development program’s solutions. (“Reply to Secretary Benson’s Letter of June 7,” H.R. Varney, Dean and Director, West Virginia University College of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics, 23 July 1954, NA RG 16, Box 2418, Folder “Farming 2 Family, Jan. 1 to Aug. 2”).

³³ *Development*, iv. As with New Deal policy, migrant agricultural workers did not fall under “agricultural policy,” but their problems were instead seen as a labor issue. In the 1955 report, the authors stated that the problems of agricultural migrant workers would be addressed by the President’s Interdepartmental Committee on Migratory Workers.

³⁴ *Development*, iv.

³⁵ This federalism philosophy, which limited government funds to the rural development program, also accepted the channeling of billions of dollars of federal funds to corporate farms through the USDA Extension Service as well as through direct payments. This contrast points out what many scholars, particularly in the field of American Political Development (APD) have explored as the “hidden state”—analyzing the realities of where government spending goes and the vast reach of the state, no matter the rhetoric surrounding it. See for example, Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: the Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

interest and enterprise of local people and communities.” Whatever action proceeded from the report’s conclusions “must be done within the American philosophy that each individual make his own decisions and set his own goals. Government has responsibility in keeping open the channels of opportunity.”³⁶ Local communities would find support in government and private enterprise as they worked to create better futures for themselves; support that came mostly in the form of federal funds would be distributed through local entities and guided by county level committees. The program would be a team effort, in other words, but the direction would come from the local communities—a governance philosophy that differed from some federal interventionist reform efforts of the New Deal period.

The approach to the problems of low-income farmers as recommended by the report was largely educational and developmental, an approach that fit within the parameters of federalism and fiscal constraints that tempered reform during the 1950s. The greatest need on the majority of America’s farms was increased income, and for those who could still work, the ability to enlarge earnings seemed to fall in two general directions: 1) through increased capital, more land and the better management of farms and 2) through more off-farm opportunity. Specifically, the report delved into fourteen “general recommendations.” These included an expansion of technical assistance and extension work programs geared toward part-time and low-income farmers; increased availability of Farmers Home Administration loans and credit; dispersal of defense industries in rural areas; a revision of formulas for grants in aid for vocational education

³⁶ *Development*, 2.

in the effort to increase them; and promotion of health and nutrition facilities and personnel in rural areas.³⁷

While farms with low incomes existed all over the nation, the report acknowledged, they were concentrated in areas of dense rural settlement with high birth rates, few outside jobs and where the natural environment hindered the use of modern machinery. The report determined "problem areas" based on three criteria: net income of full-time farmers, level of living and size of operation. Areas with incomes under \$1000, or which had had a level of income in the lowest fifth of the nation, or where 50 percent or more of the commercial farms were classed as low production were selected for study.³⁸ The majority of the "generalized problem areas" were in the U.S. South and Appalachia, though they also included the Ozark-Ouachita Mountains and border, the cut-over region of the Northern Lake States, Northwestern New Mexico and the Cascade and Northern Rocky Mountain regions. The report recommended that the rural development program begin in targeted pilot areas within these regions. In April 1955, President Eisenhower informed Congress of the administration's desire to begin the Rural Development Program, stating, "We must open wider the doors of opportunity to our million and a half farm families with extremely low incomes—for their own well being and for the good of our country and all our people."³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, 5-6. The report expanded upon these recommendations in depth.

³⁸ Ibid, 8-9. The report contrasted the so-called "problem areas" of study with non-problem rural areas, concluding that farmers in the problem areas were older, had less education and had only one-third the investment in land and buildings as non problem areas and were less mechanized. And while most of the farmers in the areas selected by the study were owners, the areas also included 80 percent of the sharecroppers in the nation, concentrated mainly in the U.S. South.

³⁹ President Eisenhower to Congress, letter transmitting the Rural Development Program proposal, 26 April 1955, as quoted in "Highlights of Fourth Rural Development Program Report," White House Press

By the time of the Rural Development Program's first annual report a little over a year later, in September 1956, Rural Development Committees had been established in 24 states, and had chosen 54 pilot rural counties and areas where the program would be focused in 1957. The lead agency for the program was the Extension Service, which helped community leaders to organize state and county level rural development committees.⁴⁰ As of July 1, 1956, ten states had worked significantly on community development through the pilot program, and ten more states planned to initiate pilot programs. The lending authority of the Farmers Home Administration had been expanded to make more credit available to smaller farmers, and the Extension service was working with state extension services to provide more on-the-farm and community assistance in pilot counties. Overall, the authors of the Report were satisfied to see that many states where the problem of low-income farming was most pressing had "taken up the Rural Development program idea as a major new approach to balanced farm, industry, and other development."⁴¹

Release, 30 October 1959, NA RG 16, Box 3299, Folder "Farming 2-2, Interagency Rural Development, Aug 1 to Nov. 20").

⁴⁰ Roth, "True D. Morse," 10.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Progress in the Rural Development Program: First Annual Report of the Secretary of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, September 1956), 5, 15. In the introductory letter of this report to President Eisenhower, Secretary Benson focused on the family farm in the midst of transformation. "The economic strength of American agriculture rests in great part on the ability of our family farms to meet the challenge of adjustment to changing conditions. All of our agricultural programs have this main objective—to help famers on family-type farms maintain and strengthen their position in a dynamic economy." For more than a million farm families, though, "the need to adjust operations to modern-day trends present complex problems." The new Rural Development Program was designed, he explained, to help families on small farms" with limited resources to attain greater opportunities in an expanding economy." The long term goals of the program were to bring significant benefits to farm families through increased opportunities, made possible through more work off the farm, better farming techniques, improved health, and better education.

In May 1957, the USDA highlighted examples of the program in action, which focused on creating this “balanced development” in rural America.⁴² The program’s main activities included increased Extension work; new credit programs for improvements in farming and helping farmers to shift production for newly developed or growing markets. The Farmers Home Administration, for example could now make loans to farmers working part-time in trade or industry. Other developments included: an increase of technical aid for small farmers to improve soil, farming practice and forestry practice; campaigns begun to expand industry and to help underemployed farmers or other rural people find full or part-time jobs in industry and trade; a review of vocational education to see if it was meeting the needs of young people; and special attention to community health and welfare needs.

Different counties across the country had begun implementing various programs. In Santa Fe County, New Mexico, leaders had organized a program to increase recreation opportunities for young people. Improved information access through radio programs and other means on services and assistance helpful to families on small farms, especially on programs like Social Security, was being developed in Van Buren County, Arkansas. In Price County, Wisconsin, local leaders had established three woodlot demonstration areas to show how to properly use forest resources. The report singled out Lewis County, West Virginia, as being typical of many pilot counties in its development of organizations. Many county level organizations had been developed to take care of various tasks—the Report named 13 committees. The Labor Committee, for example,

⁴² U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Rural Development Program,” Rural Resource Leaflet No. 1, May 1957, NA RG 16, Box 2932, Folder, “Farming 2-1, Rural Development Program July 1 to Aug. 31.” The program also printed a series called “Rural Development Program NEWS.”

studied unemployment and underemployment while the Industrial Committee studied the possibilities of locating small industry in the community.

While the Rural Development Program was small, especially in comparison to the farm programs supporting large-scale commercial agriculture, the issues it sought to target and its recognition of a changing rural and agricultural America were significant. One of the main developments Morse observed was an increased and new kind of interconnectedness between rural and urban America. As he oversaw the program, Morse contemplated the emergence of what he called a "new rural America."⁴³ This new rural America was defined by increased interconnectedness to urban America, suburban expansion, new rural dwellers, diversification of income by families on small farms and increased part-time farming.⁴⁴ Evidence was piling up, Morse observed that indicated that "the farm communities of the future will be drawn more closely than ever before into the life of urban communities." A new agricultural community was emerging that could be described as "city life widely spaced." To be of the most service, agricultural programs needed to more fully recognize the "integrated communities of rural and urban people."⁴⁵

⁴³ True D. Morse, "A New Rural America," notes for a discussion before the Kentucky Agricultural Council, Lexington, Kentucky, May 14, 1957, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/110, Folder, "XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Prog. Loans 1957."

⁴⁴ Ibid. Twenty years earlier, according to USDA statistics, 11 percent of farmers worked 100 days or more off their farms; in 1957 that figure had reached over 28 percent of farmers, and off-farm employment produced one dollar for every three dollars of the net farm income reported. At the same time that off-the-farm employment increased, Morse acknowledged that "commercial family farms have been increasing in size rapidly" but refused to concede that they were succumbing to "factory farms." In fact, even though the average size of commercial farms was growing, Morse asserted that America's farms "depend even more than formerly on family labor and in this respect are more than ever entitled to be called 'family farms'."

⁴⁵ Ibid. *Science News Letter* echoed Morse's sentiments in "Farm Scene Changes," November 23, 1957, stating that a "new rural America" is emerging and identifying "two new broad fronts in agriculture." One front was more part-time and residential farms; since 1939, part-time farming and residential farming had

The emerging New Rural America and its intertwined relationship with urban America required a rethinking of farm programs and the use rural America's resources. Farm, business, civic and agricultural leadership needed to be asking if their programs were geared to serve the new rural America, and farm programs needed to be in step with the revolution taking place on farms and in rural communities. "Are we still thinking and working with the same approaches used in the horse and mule age of agriculture—or have we shifted to the age of unlimited power and transportation and rapidly expanding road and highway systems?" queried Morse. In the end, Morse concluded, "the New Rural America is highly desirable for our great industrial Nation. The more than 85 percent of our people who are non-farm workers need the influence of the open country—and the energy and the poise that comes from rural living." This rural strength and stability was essential "if we are to have the stability and strength as a Nation to cope with the future."⁴⁶

The same year that Morse articulated his vision of a "New Rural America," the USDA established the federal Committee for Rural Development Program, which expanded the initiative beyond the USDA to include undersecretaries from a variety of agencies: Agriculture, Interior, Commerce, Labor, Health Education and Welfare, the

increased 22% the article found. The other was the increasing size of commercial family farms, with the article reporting that small-medium sized farms had decreased by 20% since 1939, and larger more productive farms had increased by 44%.

Morse anticipated that farmland values would increasingly be determined by non-agricultural factors, such as the location of good roads, demands of non-farmer buyers and suburbanization. Recognizing the growth of agribusiness, USDA economists estimated that until World War II, only about 25 percent of farm production supplies, including fertilizers, seeds and feed, came from "urban-industry" sources. In 1957, more than 60 percent of these supplies came from cities and factories. In addition, urban-based industries now often performed chores that were once done by farmers themselves, such as the contract hauling of livestock and other farm products, the pick up of eggs and milk, insect and weed control and custom harvesting.

⁴⁶ Morse, "New Rural America," 3-4.

Administrator from the Small Business Administration, and a representative of the Council on Economic Advisors.⁴⁷ In 1958, members of this committee joined others at a conference on rural development in Memphis, Tennessee. The conference recognized many of the trends and issues Morse had illustrated in his 1957 talk, identifying seven major trends of rural American society: "(1) rural standards of living were improving and rural/urban differences were diminishing; (2) rural education was improving; (3) there were fewer and larger commercial farms; (4) farming was becoming more specialized; (5) there was more part-time farming combined with part-time non-farm work; (6) there were more nonfarm residents in rural areas; and (7) city dwellers were making greater use of rural areas for recreation."⁴⁸

The conference recognized the growing importance of outdoor recreation in American life and its potential for supporting rural communities and farmers and transforming rural resource use. The rise of outdoor recreation in the postwar years was an important trend that would affect the direction of the "New Rural America" and the postwar agricultural landscape. American leaders and policymakers sought to expand the uses of American farmlands, to convert idle acres to other economic and cultural uses for the nation and to avert what was perceived to be a growing crisis in lack of outdoor recreation resources to meet Americans' needs.

⁴⁷ Roth, "True D. Morse," 12.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Concern over Outdoor Recreation Resources and the Importance of Private-Lands Recreation

The “New Rural America” was a place of both production and direct consumption, as Morse and others envisioned; key societal forces, such as the rise of tourism and outdoor recreation had the potential to reshape how the farm and rural America’s resources would be used in American life. The Rural Development Program developed amidst a rising societal concern for outdoor space and heritage, which marked the emergence of modern environmentalism, and which also shaped new dimensions of traditional wise-use conservation policy. Agricultural lands became part of America’s critical open space heritage that could solve pressing societal problems and which demanded preservation and new wise uses.

Concern over open space, including wilderness areas, and an increased interest in outdoor recreation on the part of America’s growing suburban and urban population emerged during the 1950s as rising living standards, increasing income levels and education levels allowed Americans to focus on “quality of life” issues as never before. Certainly, outdoor recreation had been a central feature in many Americans’ lives before World War II, and especially since the automobile boom of the interwar years. Outdoor recreation comprised part of early twentieth century reforms to improve the lives of industrial and city workers, to provide an escape for more well-to-do Americans, was touted as an economic industry for rural areas, and served a critical role in the depressed America of the 1930s.⁴⁹ But recreation-use exploded in the postwar years. Aided by a

⁴⁹ See Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Neil Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

rapidly expanding highway system that allowed Americans to access rural and wild places previously out of reach, visitors streamed onto public lands in ever-increasing numbers in the late 1940s and 1950s. Just as one indicator, from 1916-1941, annual visitation to the National Parks grew from 360,000 to 21 million, and in 1955 annual visitation clocked in at 56 million people per year.⁵⁰ Responding to this explosion in visitation, the National Park Service (NPS) enacted "Mission 66," an investment of \$1 billion over ten years to expand parks and their recreation facilities. Interest in national parks continued to grow and the NPS sites had 133 million visits a year in 1966 and more than 300 million annual visits by the year 2000.⁵¹ Outdoor recreation visitation in national forests grew at a similarly fast pace.

Americans were also participating in other kinds of outdoor recreation on an unprecedented scale that did not involve public lands. Fishing, hunting, camping, boating, swimming, picnicking and other outdoor activities proved immensely popular. As just one example of the varied interests in outdoor recreation, the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, in cooperation with the Associated Fishing Tackle Manufacturers and the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute, proposed an "Outdoor Recreation Project" in 1956, arguing for the national need for increased outdoor education.⁵² Americans needed to be educated

2008); and Sara M. Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁵⁰ Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 256.

⁵¹ Ibid. See also George H. Siehl, "U.S. Recreation Policies since WWII," in William C. Gartner and David W. Lime, eds, *Trends in Outdoor Recreation, Leisure and Tourism* (New York: CABI Pub, 2000), 91-101.

⁵² "The Outdoor Education Project," American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1956, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 368, Records of the Heritage

about how to wisely use their increased leisure time as work weeks shortened and vacations lengthened. Millions sought outdoor recreation pursuits, as evidenced by the 20 million who purchased fishing licenses annually, the 13 million who purchased hunting licenses annually, the 25 million who participated in boating activities in 1955 and the millions of others who participated in camping, archery and winter sports. In light of these trends, the Association argued, schools and colleges had a responsibility to teach outdoor living skills, such as casting, fishing, shooting and firearms safety, and appreciation for outdoor living. "The change from rural to urban living necessitates outdoor experiences, an understanding of the physical environment, and the wise use of natural resources," the Association concluded.⁵³

By the late 1950s, Congress had become concerned enough with the type and pace of development in the United States and with what appeared to be major threats to outdoor space that it called for the most extensive federal assessment of outdoor recreation resources in history. These threats, many of them generously supported by federal funds, included suburban expansion, industrial and defense development, airports and highways—some of which directly contributed to increased participation in outdoor recreation activities.⁵⁴ Congress approved the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review

Conservation and Recreation Service [hereafter cited as NA RG 368], Records of the Federal Inter-Agency Committee on Recreation Subject File, Box 1, Folder, "American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation."

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Suburban residential development exploded in the years after World War II in part because of generous federal support and guarantees. Federal Housing Authority loans, authorized through the Federal Housing Act passed June 27, 1934, supplemented by the G.I. Bill of 1944, which provided loans for returning World War II veterans in combination with the 1956 Federal Highway Act and a growing population resulted in a suburban building boom and an enormous national demographic shift to the suburbs. Between 1950 and 1970, America's suburban population nearly doubled from 36 to 74 million people and 83% of the nation's total growth took place in suburbs (Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the*

Commission (ORRRC) on June 28, 1958 and appointed Laurance S. Rockefeller its chairman. Its purpose was to begin a nationwide inventory and evaluation of the outdoor recreation resources of the nation. The Commission's efforts were directed toward answering three questions: (1) "What are the present outdoor recreation wants and needs of the American people and what will they be in the years 1976 and 2000?"; (2) "What are the outdoor recreation resources of the nation available to fill those needs now and what will they be in the years 1976 and 2000?"; and (3) "What policies and programs should be recommended to insure that the needs of the present and the future are adequately and efficiently met?"⁵⁵ The recommendations from the Commission would be transmitted in a report to the President and Congress.

United States [New York: Oxford University Press, 1985], 283). In addition, the federal government vigorously supported industrial and defense development, especially in the South and West. This federalized landscape took the form of factories, arsenals, highways and airports. The military-industrial complex became the West's largest employer during the Cold War years, transforming the landscape as Congress poured over \$100 billion into the region to build dams, highways, airfields, training camps, supply depots, warehouses as well as to develop high-tech industrial areas such as the Silicon Valley in California (Gerald D. Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West* [Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999], 78, 87). By 1944, manufacturing had surpassed agriculture as the main source of income payments in the South and the defense industry became the largest employer in Tennessee and Louisiana by 1976 (Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 102, 140). In terms of agricultural land-use, farmland declined 99 million acres between 1950 and 1969 because of such development across the United States (Pierre Crosson, "The Use and Management of Rural Space," in Emery N. Castle *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995], 135-6).

In the fall of 1959, *Life* magazine ran a feature on the problems in agriculture in anticipation of the 1960 presidential campaign, determining these postwar developments discussed above to be "natural forces" that would "cut down" on the farmland in production and help to solve the surplus problem. The magazine also advocated for a new policy agenda for the land to deal with these issues. "Spreading residential areas are eating into farm fields. Federal highways are slicing across prime farmland," wrote *Life*. But these "natural adjustments will need to be complemented immediately by new plans from U.S. policymakers." These "natural adjustments" were anything but in many cases, as the federal government supported and guided them ("The Farm Problem: Part III: Men on the Margin," *Life*, November 30, 1959, 109).

⁵⁵ Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, *Progress Report* (Washington, DC: GPO, January 1961), iii.

The rising popularity of outdoor recreation had at its core the growth of metropolitan America. One of the “outstanding” characteristics of American society and its economy since World War II had been the “astounding growth of the metropolitan area,” the January 1961 ORRRC interim report observed.⁵⁶ Since the end of World War II, the expanding urban and suburban population had more leisure time, more money to spend, more travel facilities and more highways to travel, and had consequently been demanding more and better opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. As a result, outdoor recreation had taken on a new, more important role in American life: “Since the close of World War II, outdoor recreation has assumed a new and more significant proportion in a changing American culture.”⁵⁷

As demand increased, however, so did problems of the administration of natural resources. Picnic grounds and campsites overflowed, boats jammed lakes and beaches were crowded with people. The report did not see any slowing of these trends in sight, observing that the same factors which “brought about the accelerated demand for outdoor recreation—growth of population, income, leisure time—seemed certain to continue.”⁵⁸ At the same time, other kinds of development, such as highways, airports, suburbs and factories threatened vital outdoor resources and diminished outdoor recreation opportunities.

The premise of the ORRRC study was that as future demand for outdoor recreation continued to rise, the nation’s supply of natural resources would not be able

⁵⁶ *Progress Report*, 13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

meet the demand and a fundamental gap would form between available outdoor recreation opportunities and those the American people would want.⁵⁹ Central to this problematic gap was the increasing concentration of people in a few areas of the nation, mainly around urban centers, and the resulting pressure on outdoor spaces near those areas. America, in other words, suffered from an “imbalance” when it came to population and outdoor recreation resources. The majority of people resided in the East, while the majority of public recreation resources were in the West. Increased outdoor recreation resources near population centers were necessary, the report concluded, particularly opportunities for day-use. To ensure such opportunities, recreation uses needed to be able to “compete successfully” with other uses for high-value lands near metropolitan areas. These uses included agriculture. Indeed, what was key about farms was that many were near population centers. Most Americans could not get to the vast open spaces of Yellowstone but once a year, but many farms provided easy access to the outdoors on a regular basis.

Identifying the potential for recreation resources on private lands was a major aim of the ORRRC because it perceived private lands would meet the need for recreation space near major population centers that public lands could not fulfill. The vast majority of the natural resources of the nation lay in private hands and this was particularly true in more heavily populated areas. Of the 1.9 billion acres of land in the contiguous lower 48 states, 70 percent, or 1.3 billion acres, was privately owned, and of that nearly one billion

⁵⁹ Ibid.

acres were in farms.⁶⁰ Farming and grazing constituted the major uses for private land in the United States, with 465 million acres (or 24 percent of the contiguous 48 states) in cropland, 615 million acres (32 percent) in woodland and forest, and 633 million acres (34 percent) in grassland, pasture and grazing land. The remaining 10 percent of private land in the lower 48 (191 million acres) was devoted to other uses, including roads, urban and town areas, parks, wildlife refuges, national defense areas, marshes, dunes, and farmsteads.⁶¹

The commission believed that the government had an important role to play in supporting the development of private sector outdoor recreation based around multipurpose use. Such development on the part of private business was to be “encouraged, stimulated, and fostered by government policies.” Where private landowners could not carry out multipurpose uses profitably, public subsidization would achieve the desired results: “Whether direct or indirect, governmental incentives could result in the release of significant quantities of recreation resources, integrating the private sectors more closely into national recreational development.” Finally, the ORRRC recognized that outdoor recreation development could provide business opportunities and stimulate local and regional economies. The Commission interpreted the rise of new industries and business based on outdoor recreation as “further cause for

⁶⁰ *Progress Report*, 15-16, 80. Twenty-six percent of land in the contiguous lower 48 states was owned by Federal, State, county or other local governments, about 500 million acres. Of the public land, 400 million acres, or 80 percent, were Federal lands, 16 percent, or 80 million acres, were State lands, and local government uses accounted for four percent of the total land area (17 million acres).

⁶¹ *Progress Report*, 16. The ORRRC took its statistics from the USDA publications, *Major Uses of Land in the United States, 1954* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1954) and the 1958 Yearbook of Agriculture, *Land* (Washington DC: GPO, 1958), and from the US Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of United States* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1960).

bringing the private sector more closely into outdoor recreation development endeavors.”⁶²

Other groups, including the longstanding conservation organization, the Izaak Walton League, agreed that the federal government had a role in stimulating and even managing outdoor recreation resources on private lands, including farms. William E. Towell, the Director of the Missouri Conservation Commission emphatically argued at the League’s 37th meeting in 1959 that public agencies “must manage outdoor recreation resources on private lands” and that state and federal agencies could not ignore their responsibilities on private lands. Farm programs in particular could actively increase hunting opportunities, especially if incentives were provided to make wildlife production profitable for farmers.⁶³ One of the most important elements of improving hunting opportunities on private land was improving the farmer-sportsman relationship through public agencies’ responsibilities to “teach hunters their obligation to farmers and to explode the farmer-myth that all city hunters are fence busters, cattle shooters and gate leaver-openers.” It was time for public agencies to take action on these fronts. “Let’s not sit back and allow diminished outdoor recreation be the price we pay for farm surpluses, price supports, wetland drainage, pollution and habitat destruction,” Towell admonished. “Outdoor recreation resources can be managed on private as well as public lands!” If

⁶² ORRRC Policy Paper #6, n.d., NA RG 368, Records of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission Central File, Box 12, Folder, “Policy Papers.”

⁶³ Remarks by William E. Towell, Director, Missouri Conservation Commission, “Can public agencies manage outdoor recreation resources on private lands?” 37th Annual Convention, the Izaak Walton League of America, 23 April 1959, NA RG 368, Records of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission Central File, Box 13, Folder, “Presentation of Final Report.”

public agencies did not take responsibility on this front, and organized sportsmen did not actively back them, then all would lose out.⁶⁴

Others at the meeting reflected on the current problems and pressures facing American natural and outdoor recreation resources. The nation had entered a paradoxical time, commented Sigurd F. Olson, president of the National Parks Association. Where not long before, America had "space to burn" and sought to eliminate wilderness to make room for farms, towns and cities, now, barely a half century later, America faced the problem "of trying to preserve the wild country we once tried desperately to destroy." While many conservationists embraced Aldo Leopold's philosophy of the land ethic, Olson observed that the nation was still far from "achieving the ethical balance between conservation, the growing needs of our population and our burgeoning industrial complex." Action needed to be taken swiftly as pressures on land for commodities and recreational use increased and the population swelled. Without such action, natural areas would likely disappear except for those protected by the government, wildlife would find sanctuary only in public refuges and "even the countryside itself" would lose its character and appeal. The time had come when America could not just look to government reserves to solve the demand for outdoor recreation space: "they are important and vital, but there are simply not enough of these last superlatively endowed areas left to satisfy outdoor-hungry Americans and time will prove how inadequate they are."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Remarks by Sigurd F. Olson, Wilderness Ecologist, the Izaak Walton League of America and President, National Parks Association, "The Conservation Challenge," 37th Annual Convention, the Izaak Walton League of America, 25 April 1959, NA RG 368, Records of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission Central File, Box 13, Folder, "Presentation of Final Report." Aldo Leopold was a major figure in American conservation history, and argued for human stewardship toward the natural world, and

To create an agenda to meet the needs of the present and the future, conservation needed to be interpreted in the "broadest" possible terms and encourage multiple-uses of lands and waters. All land in America needed to be viewed for its recreational value, including agricultural lands in Olson's estimation: "We must look at farming country, open ranges, fields where cattle and sheep graze and where crops of all kinds are being raised"—places that until that moment were thought of no importance at least from the outdoor recreation perspective. The time had come when all lands, "no matter their classification" needed to be administered in a way that fulfilled multiple functions while still preserving "the ideal that the highest use is the effect these lands have on the spiritual well-being of our people." America could no longer afford single use practices such as mining, soil draining wetlands and stripping forests without "regard for the overall impact on human lives" or the beauty and character of the land.

This conservation concept, which advocated for the multiple uses of private lands and farms for recreational purposes, comprised part of the new conservation direction for the future and would inform federal rural development and conservation agendas of the 1960s. These new conceptions of conservation arose from what conservation leaders considered the problems of the present and the needs of the future. As with conservation policy during the Progressive and New Deal periods, conservation after World War II evolved to meet pressing societal needs. In the post World War II case, this evolution included adapting to the demand for outdoor recreation and developing new uses for

especially the land. Perhaps his most famous work expressing this land ethic, *A Sand County Almanac*, was published in 1949 (Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949]).

private, agricultural lands to meet this demand as well as to meet the social and economic problems rural America faced. Outdoor recreation became another “wise use.”

In addition, related to the demand for outdoor recreation and the desire for suburban and urban Americans to get outside, postwar conservation as it developed in the 1950s sought to conserve and augment the beauty of the agrarian landscape for all Americans to enjoy. This conservation concept responded to the changing relationships between rural, suburban and urban America that Morse recognized and articulated. For the first time, federal conservation policy began to target fulfilling the consumption desires of urban and suburban Americans to literally use and experience rural, agricultural lands. This calculus, in the minds of policymakers, would benefit all Americans and conserve natural resources in the appropriate way for the future of a modernizing, urbanizing nation. The multiple-uses of agricultural lands was critical to this evolving conservation agenda.

Indeed, the national preoccupation with outdoor recreation by the late 1950s and its implications for agricultural land use and rural communities were not lost on the policymakers working on rural development issues in the USDA. In November 1959, Morse reached out to Francis W. Sargent, the ORRRC’s Executive Director and Laurence Rockefeller, its Chairman.⁶⁶ Morse was aware that the USDA was already working closely with Sargent and his staff on the outdoor recreation resources of the national forests, but advised that there were other potential areas for cooperation. “As you know,”

⁶⁶ True D. Morse to Laurence Rockefeller, 16 November 1959, NA RG 16, Box 3297, Folder “Farming 2, Rural Development Program, Nov. 1 to Nov. 30 (1 of 2).”

he wrote, "there is another major area in which we might be of assistance to you and the Commission." This area was rural and agricultural America.

At that time, many people were recreating in the rural areas where low-income farm families lived and the numbers were growing. Rural recreation held "considerable promise of success toward providing supplemental cash income to rural people who are most in need," Morse explained, expressing his hopes that the Rural Development Program could help the Commission to emphasize the important use and development of recreational resources on privately-owned rural lands.⁶⁷ The development of rural recreational resources had the potential to stimulate and transform rural communities and agriculture, Morse continued. They could form the basis for "improved scenic and recreational areas, increased tourist business, and additional new money to these low-

⁶⁷ Ibid. The Rural Development Program's interest in farm recreation marked the first time a federal effort had officially pushed such a land-use and conservation agenda, but the idea of farm recreation and rural tourism was itself not new. Throughout the 1930s, the state of West Virginia, for example, promoted its rural heritage and landscapes in promotional materials. In a report for the West Virginia Extension Service, Nat Terry Frame saw potential in tourism for small farmers, particularly near urban centers, and the promotion of West Virginia's rural and agrarian life. The Extension Service, in his estimation, needed to provide "such encouragement to tourists as will bring consumers directly to the door steps of West Virginia's part-time as well as full-time farmers." Country life "jubilees," forest festivals, music festivals and "other efforts to bring forward the best in West Virginia country life will continue to advertise our state and attract visitors." These activities would be not only pleasurable and educational, but would bring thousands of "part-time farmers their chance at direct marketing of handicrafts and home grown foodstuffs" (129). In his suggestions, Frame anticipated postwar federal and state efforts to help out small farms, particularly distressed low-income farms in general and those in the region of Appalachia. The idea that these small farms could not compete in the national market, and thus tourists and consumers would need to directly go to farms or local farmers' markets to assist the local economy resonated not only in the 1960s but also does so today. One of the ways to achieve rural revival in postwar rural development policy was to have consumers directly interact with farmers and directly consume the agrarian/rural experience. (Nat Terry Frame, "Grass Roots in West Virginia: Agriculture and Rural Life, Part Two: History of Agricultural, Horticultural and Home Economics Extension from the Close of World War One to the Beginning of the New Deal," West Virginia Extension Service and USDA Bureau of Agricultural Economics, West Virginia University, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, Papers of the West Virginia 4-H Clubs, Call No. A&M 2286, Box 2).

income families.”⁶⁸ Sargent agreed that the development of rural areas “may be expected to play an increasing role in outdoor recreation and certainly this aspect will be carefully considered by the Commission.”⁶⁹

Shifting agricultural land-use and resources, including to recreation, was a defining feature of Morse’s “New Rural America.” By 1959, recreation on private lands featured prominently as a solution to problems of both rural and urban America in a way it had not at the conception of the Rural Development Program in 1954. Outdoor recreation had become a “cash crop” that was being “cultivated” across rural America, Morse explained in a speech in 1959. Forty percent of farmers’ incomes came from other sources, including industry, tourism and recreation.⁷⁰ Washington County, Maine reported \$1.5 million in additional income because of Rural Development activities targeted at sportsmen and tourists. The growing national interest in campgrounds provided a good opportunity for farmers, Morse argued, who could maintain campsites on lands they were not currently using for agricultural purposes throughout the winter for added income. Tourism in general proved to be a big business with great potential for rural areas and the growing number of tourist and retirement homes could bolster flagging economies.⁷¹ As with all the expressions of the New Rural America, the vision both included and extended beyond the farm; the promise of rural renewal lay in off-farm

⁶⁸ True D. Morse to Francis Sargent, 10 November 1959, NA RG 16, Box 3297, Folder “Farming 2, Rural Development Program Nov. 1 to Nov. 30 (2 of 2).”

⁶⁹ Francis Sargent to True D. Morse, 12 November 1959, NA RG 16, Box 3297, Folder “Farming 2, Rural Development Program Nov. 1 to Nov. 30 (2 of 2).”

⁷⁰ True D. Morse, “The New Rural America—of the Future,” 21 October 1959, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/110, Folder, “XIIIB2c, Rural Devel. Prog. Loans, 59-60.”

⁷¹ True D. Morse, “Rural Development in Action,” 7 September 1960, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/110, Folder, “XIIIB2c, Rural Devel. Prog. Loans, 59-60.”

opportunities as well as new uses and a reconceptualization of America's farms through new rural conservation measures. "All this and much more adds up to a rapidly changing agriculture and a New Rural America, today and especially for tomorrow," Morse concluded in 1960.⁷²

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) saw rural and agricultural lands as a way to solve the recreation demand problems of the United States and the Rural Development Program saw recreation and multiple-use approaches on agricultural lands as a way to solve problems in agricultural America and to make its vision of a new and sustaining rural America. Others saw the multiple uses of private lands, including agricultural ones, as critical to a modern conservation agenda. At the time neither initiative, the ORRRC nor the Rural Development Program, articulated recreation on America's farmlands to be a solution to the farm surplus problem, but under the Kennedy Administration it would come to serve that purpose as well. On October 1959, Eisenhower issued Executive Order No. 10847 which officially established the Committee for Rural Development Program to further and to expedite the program's activities.⁷³ Later that month Morse sent Vice President Nixon a copy of the Executive

⁷² True D. Morse, "Agriculture of Tomorrow," 22 June 1960, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/110, Folder, "XIIIB2c, Rural Devel. Prog. Loans, 59-60." Others recognized these changes, or what the West Virginia Extension Service 1958 *Plan of Work* called the "changing rural scene." West Virginia communities "are quite different today from what they were a few years ago, due to the many changes that have occurred," observed the *Plan of Work*. Of the changes taking place, "the most noticeable perhaps, is the rapid decline in numbers of farms. Many family farms of a few years ago, are now 'week-end' and 'sun-down' farms or places of residence only" (West Virginia University, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, Agricultural Extension Service, County Agents' Reports, 1955-1958, Call no. A&M 1432, p. 228).

⁷³ Along with this Executive Order, the White House touted the progress of the program and excerpted highlights from the fourth *Annual Report of the Secretary of Agriculture on the Rural Development Program* ("Highlights of Fourth Rural Development Program Report," White House Press Release, 30 October 1959, NA RG 16, Box 3299, Folder "Farming 2-2, Interagency Rural Development, Aug 1 to Nov.

Order, explaining its significance and concluding, "a new rural economy is developing which has tremendous implications for the future. Rural communities are being remade."⁷⁴

*

The sun was "rising" on a "new rural America," Morse wrote in *The Washington Post* in 1959, and central to the development of this new community were the "rural renewal" efforts of the past decade. In a foreshadowing of debates to come in the 1960s, Morse asserted that the nation had "long recognized" the benefits of urban renewal, but equal attention had not been given rural renewal, which "is having a tremendous impact on the Nation's economic and social well-being." Such renewal took the form of larger, more efficient family farms, towns with expanding industry for farm people to commute to, long-term conservation and reforestation, new rural schools and improved roads and markets.⁷⁵

This New Rural America would be a thriving, welcome place to live and make a home. It would boast a more balanced and diversified economy, industries and trade and

20"). The report showed for the year: hundreds of projects to improve farms and farming; improved forests; expanded wood finishing and processing industries; thousands of new jobs because of industry growth, and more income from other activities. The Farmers Home Administration had increased lending in rural development counties by \$3,000,000 in 1958-59. Through regular credit programs, the Small Business Administration shared in 68 loans for \$2,540,885 in 48 participating counties. A press release a month later described how the program had expanded to include 200 counties in 30 states and Puerto Rico. 320 projects to improve farming and farming methods were underway. Processing plants and factories for clothing, livestock feed, charcoal, boats and other products resulted in 8000 additional jobs in 52 counties participating in the program.

⁷⁴ True D. Morse to Richard Nixon, 26 October 1959, NA RG 16, Box 3297, Folder, "Farming 2, Rural Development Program, Sept. 20 to Oct. 30 (2 of 2)."

⁷⁵ True D. Morse, "Country Livin' On a New Rural America, the Sun is Really Rising," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 1959.

services, busy towns with fully employed people living on the farm and in the country. Secretary Benson called the Rural Development Program "one of the most important and beneficial programs inaugurated by the Administration." In the next ten years, Benson predicted, the nation would turn "increasingly to rural areas and the towns serving them for the resources, manpower, living and working space and recreational facilities needed to support economic growth and maintain a stable, vigorous national life."⁷⁶ Even though the trend had been toward urban and suburban centers, rural America would once again, with federal support, become the key place to live in America.

As the Eisenhower Administration neared its close, there was a lot of talk about the Rural Development Program's successes from Washington, but the program did not enact widespread change. The program was criticized for its limited scope, paltry funding and decentralized nature. Washington ended up being more of a cheerleader than anything. The Rural Development Program did not fix rural poverty, it did not make a dent in the major uses of American lands in the decade after World War II or stem the tide of commercial agriculture. It did not challenge the dominant system of agriculture, or the fundamental political culture that equated the good life with economic growth. The goals of the program were to stem the tide of rural poverty, to diversify income and occupations in the countryside, to move beyond the farm and to encourage different ways to use the land and resources of rural America in light of the demands, desires and pressures of the nation.

⁷⁶ "Secretary's Report Reviews Rural Development Program Progress," USDA Press release, 13 October 1960, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/110, Folder, "XIIJB2c Rural Devel. Prog. Loans, 59-60."

The program recognized colliding demands upon the land, and both the limits and promise of agriculture for small farmers in postwar America. It recognized the interconnectedness of American society and the rise of trends that would define future problems of the nation. The program joined the ORRRC to figure out new ways to best use America's agricultural lands and resources to meet the needs of most people. In so doing, it brought attention to the problems of land use in postwar society, helped to forge new dimensions in conservation policy and aligned with a growing awareness in American society by the late 1950s of poverty amidst prosperity, a questioning of the Consumer's Republic and all that it represented. The realities of American poverty and the human and environmental consequences of American development were gaining national recognition by the late 1950s and would only continue to grow in prominence during the 1960s. And finally, the program and the larger discussion around rural land use laid the foundation for a new land-use resource and conservation agenda for the 1960s.

In his assessment of the achievements and shortcomings of the rural development program in 1961, Don Paarlberg, the head of the task force that became the basis of the Rural Development Program, argued that the program had "brought into the open and achieved better understanding of a group of problems that had previously been glossed over." These problems included the existence of rural poverty; poor utilization of human resources and the failure of price-support programs to help the small operator. The program addressed the "fiction" that commodity price support programs were designed to help the small farmer; these programs in fact did almost nothing for the small farmers

they allegedly served, and instead the farm policy focus and outflow of federal money were "excessively concentrated on large operators for whom incomes were already well above average."⁷⁷ Until these problems were "understood they cannot be solved, and until they can be discussed dispassionately, they cannot be understood," Paarlberg remarked.

The major shortcoming of the program, in his judgment, was that the program had been too small and had "failed to grow properly." The program needed more administrative heft behind it to truly enact fundamental change, and the appropriations were not enough. The "bland administrative approach" had resulted in the failure to identify specific funds, programs and personnel to the detriment of the program's aims. The Department of Agriculture had spent about 400 times as much just in carrying surplus wheat, corn, and cotton as it had spent on the Rural Development Program, he continued, and "in my opinion, the cause of equity would be advanced by cutting expenditures for price support, which go to better off farmers, and increasing the resources available to the Rural Development Program, which lifts the capabilities of those in greater need." This transfer of resources from one sector of the economy to another, if required, was a "Federal task." Paarlberg felt that the federal inputs for the initiative consisted of "liberal quantities of inspiration and publicity, with very modest inputs of funds and central direction." Indeed, if one computed a ratio of word output per dollar input, program by program, "the Rural Development Program would, I think, rank near the top, exceeded perhaps by the activities of the Peace Corps and Caroline

⁷⁷ Paarlberg, "Rural Development Achievements," 1512.

Kennedy.” Ultimately, Paarlberg concluded, the nearly 10 million people who lived in the areas targeted by the Rural Development Program identified with the agricultural agencies over other agencies, like Commerce or Health, Education and Welfare, and the Department of Agriculture had a duty to adequately serve these constituents.⁷⁸

What Paarlberg did not mention, but which also affected the program’s ability to execute, was congressional indifference or even outright hostility to the program. The federal Rural Development Program lacked executive muscle and administrative direction; it also experienced Congressional opposition. In 1957, the Extension Service received an appropriation of \$640,000 to carry out rural development duties. By 1960 that amount had increased to only \$2,000,000. As Dennis Roth points out, these low levels of funding had much to do with the opposition of Jamie Whitten (D-MS) to the program. Whitten was the chairman of the House of Agricultural Appropriation Subcommittee and a powerful force on Capitol Hill (he was sometimes called the “permanent secretary of agriculture”). Whitten saw the program as a way for the Republican administration to avoid dealing with the real issue at hand—adequate farm income for commercial producers. In addition to Whitten, many congressional Democrats were suspicious that “rural development” was actually a “smokescreen” for the Republican agenda to cut price supports.⁷⁹

Thus, while the first USDA postwar Rural Development Program faced long odds and lacked support in many arenas, it still provides an important window unto the evolution federal conservation policy and rural land use after World War II. ●ne of the

⁷⁸ Ibid, 1514-15, 1517-18.

⁷⁹ Roth, “True D. Morse,” 9.

most important legacies of the Rural Development Program was the new rural America that it recognized—the recognition of increasingly connected rural and urban communities and the advocacy of new uses of rural resources that targeted the needs of these new “integrated communities.” Morse called for new, innovative strategies to match the emerging new rural America and argued that farm programs needed to evolve to more fully address the needs of interconnected rural and urban communities in modern America.

In addition to changes in the agricultural industry, the Rural Development Program recognized and took into account the rising public interest in outdoor recreation and agriculture’s potential in that realm, helping to forge new directions for conservation policy. While the discussion truly centered around preserving the traditional family farm concept in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the rural development thrust of the mid to late 1950s pushed beyond (but still included) the farm to recognize trends already developing on the land, envision other uses for agrarian lands and seek other opportunities for the people who worked those lands. Equally important as traditional family farming was the development of other kinds of land use and economic industries in rural America, such as factories, tourism and recreation for suburban and urban Americans on and around America’s farms. By pushing for multiple-uses of private lands and becoming involved in a movement that valued the beauty of agrarian spaces in this way, the Rural Development Program, along with other conservation leaders, capitalized on trends and helped to push conservation policy in new directions. It added private, agricultural lands

to a natural resource agenda dominated by public lands, both in terms of federal conservation policy at the time and in the historical literature.

The concept of multiple uses of private lands and agricultural land use adjustment would forge a central part of the Kennedy Administration's New Frontier agricultural conservation and rural development agendas and become a tool for achieving President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society efforts to craft a wholesome, balanced and naturally beautiful society. Federal programs to create recreational opportunities on America's farms that had been raised in theory by the late 1950s, comprised a key part of a 1960s rural federal agenda and would be implemented in the hopes of solving multiple societal problems that had grown and been identified during the 1950s: low income for small family farmers, farm surplus, and limited outdoor recreational space and opportunities for an increasingly urban and suburban nation. The shifts that had begun in the 1950s would expand in the 1960s and continue to shape conservation policy in new directions.

Chapter 2: "Selling" the Farm: New Frontier Conservation and the Farm Recreation Programs of the 1960s

Introduction

When the Kennedy administration took office in January 1961, it built upon the rural conservation foundation developed during the mid to late 1950s, particularly pursuing the idea of land-use adjustment and multiple-uses for private lands. Policymakers in the USDA, including Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, saw new private lands conservation and land-use adjustment measures as central to guiding American development and solving multiple problems of post World War II American society. These problems included rural poverty, low-income farms, damaging agricultural surplus, rural to urban migration, urban congestion and blight, the disappearance of outdoor recreation space and Americans' dwindling connection with the outdoors. These leaders argued that a new and innovative conservation agenda was required to address all of these problems.

One component of this conservation agenda was the adjustment of agricultural lands to other "wise" uses that retained the agrarian foundation of the land, connected people to agrarian spaces but did not contribute to the overproduction of traditional agricultural products. Farm recreation was one touted use. American conservation leaders, influenced by the ORRRC findings, believed that outdoor recreation space was being critically limited through other kinds of development and a new conservation agenda was required to meet outdoor recreation demand.

Congress authorized such a conservation agenda through the passage of the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act, which included a federal farm recreation program. The 1960s federal farm recreation programs serve as a case study of this conservation agenda and I examine them in this chapter. The USDA conservation agenda became part of federal visions of reforming and improving society, creating social, economic and cultural opportunities, facilitating rural-urban connections and shaping a balanced American future. At the same time, the conservation agenda under Kennedy forged a new direction for conservation ideology to meet the demands of modern America through the implementation of multiple uses of private lands.

The 1962 White House Conference on Conservation

At the May 1962 White House Conference on Conservation, leaders discussed the transformations in American life that required new directions in conservation policy: an increasingly urban society and its attendant problems, a rapidly developing suburban population, a huge and growing demand for outdoor recreation, unprecedented agricultural abundance, an increasing reliance on scientific research and expertise, and a new global order as a result of World War II and the Cold War. Revealing the heightened importance of outdoor recreation in federal conservation agendas, Laurence Rockefeller, chairman of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, chaired the conference.

As the primary spokesmen and architect of the Kennedy Administration's conservation agenda, Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall gave an overall picture of the

hopes and problems facing America and its conservation needs in the 1960s. He first paid homage to history and to the achievements of men who formed an "honor roll of greatness" in the realm of conservation and preservation: John Muir, John Wesley Powell and George Perkins Marsh.¹ Udall highlighted the major conservation efforts of Theodore Roosevelt's administration, under which the conservation movement "crystallized" and the next major conservation period under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Out of the "grave domestic crisis" of the Great Depression came action programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), which "changed the face of our country." Furthermore, 1962 was a timely year in the history of American land-use. It was the 100th anniversary of the Homestead Act, the Morrill Act, which established the land-grant universities, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

But the issues facing America in 1962 demanded more than a reflection on history; they called for new programs and a "bold forward thrust to meet the demands of tomorrow" Udall asserted. "The quiet conservation crisis of the 1960s," he remarked, "has resulted neither from folly nor ignorance, but from our very success as a nation—it touches our total environment, affects all of our resources, and is heightened by the demands of our burgeoning cities, thriving industry and expanding population."²

Nineteen-sixty-two was not 1908, or 1935, even if its conservation agenda built upon the

¹ White House Conference on Conservation, *Official Proceedings* (Washington, DC: GPO, May, 1962), 6.

² Udall's 1963 *New York Times* bestseller on conservation had the same title, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

pivotal foundations of the Progressive and New Deal eras.³ Indeed, if “the forester and reclamation engineer” symbolized the national effort during Theodore Roosevelt’s time, and the TVA planner and the CCC tree planter “typified the New Deal,” the “swift ascendancy of technology has made the bulldozer, the rocket and the laboratory scientists symbolize our hope—and problems—in the 1960s.” It was the conviction of the Kennedy administration that a “new effort of Rooseveltian proportions” be enacted “if we are to secure an adequate resource base for the future, and plan the use of our land resources so that material progress and the creation of a life-giving environment will go hand in hand.”⁴

One vital part of that Rooseveltian effort was the application of the public lands multiple use idea to private lands, argued Kennedy’s Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman. He pointed out that senators debated the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962 that very day. This bill contained new conservation provisions proposed by the administration and would, if passed, be part of the “bold forward thrust” of the “new frontiers” in conservation and the demands of the time. The Agricultural Act of 1962, Freeman argued, was a “conservation milestone,” particularly with regard to private lands since the current “great need for conservation is on privately owned land.” Much attention had been devoted to the multiple-use concept on public lands, such as using national forest land simultaneously for timber, recreation, wildlife, forage and water; now

³ As David B. Danbom points out in *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), “the inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the beginning of his New Deal program in March of 1933 signaled a dramatic shift in the relationship between the federal government and rural America” (206). The federal government of the 1960s both had to deal with the consequences of that shift, and pushed that relationship in new directions, forging a new kind of relationship with rural America and private farmlands that this project explores.

⁴ *Proceedings*, 7-8.

the 1962 Act would apply the public lands multiple use idea to private lands, many of them agricultural. The nation stood at that moment on a “new frontier in conservation, to apply more broadly the concept of multiple use to private lands.”⁵ This new agenda was particularly critical in the “modern setting of an urban society,” Freeman argued.

President Kennedy’s proposed agriculture program brought together “for the first time the concept of a balanced agriculture, conservation, and urban need to use land and water for a multiplicity of purposes.”⁶

New conservation measures would adjust agricultural land use in a new direction that could simultaneously solve the problems of agricultural surplus and diminishing outdoor recreation resources. “We have the unique opportunity to bring together two problems of great concern to this Nation,” Freeman remarked. “On the one hand, an abundance of food, on the other, a shortage of recreation. And we find that in the process

⁵ Ibid, 12-13.

⁶ Ibid, 13. The farm recreation policies authorized in the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act and implemented thence forth both forged a new direction for the land, the purpose of agriculture, rural life, conservation and the federal government for very distinct social and economic purposes, and served to entrench long-held agrarian stereotypes in the effort to meet suburban and urban ideals and agricultural economic needs. Certain authors have argued that urban America, not rural America, has primarily held the torch for agrarian stereotypes.

The problems of rural development, the agricultural sector, suburban expansion, urban needs and conservation in postwar America were all intertwined by the late 1950s and early 1960s. For the first time, federal policymakers focused on private lands as a significant way to contribute to the outdoor desires of Americans, as well as on how the outdoor desires of Americans could contribute to fixing the economic and land-use woes of rural America. In his revision of the origins of modern wilderness ideology, Paul Sutter acknowledges that much more has been written about public lands management because effective regulation of private land use in America has been difficult to achieve. He further argues that we need “a much fuller understanding of the environmental impacts of consumption”—the ways in which our “roles and identities as consumers have shaped how we idealize and preserve nature” (*Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002], 244). This dissertation contributes to that “fuller understanding” by showing how currently disparate stories of land-use were intimately intertwined and by highlighting another story of private lands federal policy that has not yet been told during this period.

of solving the one, we can solve the other.”⁷ The solutions of farm problems and of “urban people seeking space for living and outdoor recreation can be found in conservation principles and the multiple use of private land.” As the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission had concluded, Freeman insisted that the opportunities for outdoor recreation on public land alone could not meet the national demand, but that “the expansion of recreational opportunities on privately owned lands, the farms ranches and woodlands which make up three-fourths of our land area, plus the public facilities, can meet the demand.” Such activity was already happening across the nation, in the form of vacation farms, picnic areas, sports centers, fishing, hunting and nature preserves and camping. Freeman saw “increasing evidence” that finding solutions to the “problems of overproduction and superabundance” would at the same time “work out solutions to many economic and social problems unique in an urban society.”⁸

In an iteration of traditional wise-use conservation philosophy that guided these new dimensions of conservation ideology, Freeman asserted that land not needed for traditional agricultural purposes should not lie idle, but should be put to productive use. “Idleness is not, and must never become a part of either conservation or agricultural policy,” he argued. He was “sick and tired” of hearing about retired and idle acres. Every extra acre of cropland could be put to productive economic use—for pasture and range, for timber, for fish and game, for wild creatures, for water conservation and supply, and for outdoor recreation.⁹ Indeed, the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962

⁷ *Proceedings*, 12.

⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

contained the administration's proposals for how the USDA could support such multiple uses of America's farmlands. These provisions included loans to farmers to get recreation businesses off the ground, or to acquire land for that purpose, and a series of recreational pilot projects focused on watershed multiple use on private lands.

In response to what policymakers perceived to be urban and rural needs, Freeman introduced a set of conservation policy solutions based on agricultural land-use adjustment. These solutions were designed to revitalize and stimulate small farms and the communities that depended on them, while at the same time creating the essential places for urban and suburban Americans to connect with their outdoor heritage in an increasingly urban society. Nestled between the continuous development of ever larger commercial farms, ever larger cities, suburbia and defense industries lay the potential of another mixed landscape of family farms and rural outdoor spaces that were, in the minds of key federal policymakers, essential to America's welfare and future.

New Frontier Conservation and Land-Use Adjustment

As Freeman took office, he and his staff built on previous administration's policies, particularly in rural development, and took steps to distance themselves from what had turned out to be an unpopular Benson administration. During the 1960 election Democrats blamed Secretary Benson's policies and free market ideology for huge farm surpluses and low commodity prices. Kennedy campaigned to reverse this trend, guaranteeing price supports again, a policy that would remain in place throughout the 1960s. Indeed, direct federal payments to farmers more than doubled to \$1.7 billion

dollars between 1959 and 1962.¹⁰ Kennedy also promised a broader and more direct government role in rural America.

Freeman's particular beliefs and approaches, including his conviction that recreation would be a promising avenue for farmlands and rural economies in the future, proved central to the agricultural conservation agenda that took root during the 1960s. Day-to-day Kennedy was not interested in agriculture or conservation issues and wanted a "secretary of agriculture who would leave him free to direct his attention elsewhere."¹¹ He chose Orville Freeman, who hailed from a farm state, supported the Democratic farm platform and who had just lost his fourth bid for governor of Minnesota. Freeman admitted he was not a farmer or a farm expert; he had worked summers on his extended family's farm and governed a farm state, but by training and profession he was a lawyer. One historian suggests Kennedy liked that Freeman lacked close ties to agriculture and thought he might "offer a fresh perspective."¹²

It seems Kennedy was right. While Freeman had to spend much of his time on price support and larger farm issues, his passions lay elsewhere. He took a serious and central interest in rural development, and was vitally interested in conservation and the ways Americans could use land more effectively for societal needs. Freeman did not want the Secretary of Agriculture job originally and would have preferred Attorney

¹⁰ *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture* (North Logan, UT: Letter Press Software, Inc.), Lesson 3, http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/classroom/index_inst.htm.

¹¹ Dennis Roth, "The Kennedy Administration Picks Up the Pace," *Federal Rural Development Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2002), 1. Kennedy infamously told the economist (and his advisor) John Kenneth Galbraith: "I don't want to hear about agricultural policy from anybody but you, Ken, and I don't want to hear about it from you either" (Richard A. Levins, *Willard Cochrane and the American Family Farm* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), "Foreward").

¹² Roth, "The Kennedy Administration," 1.

General or Interior Secretary, reflecting his interest in conservation. As an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, Freeman had become good friends with fellow Minnesotan Hubert Humphrey, who rose to political prominence after World War II and held a U.S. Senate seat at the time of Kennedy's election. After Freeman's fourth bid for governor of Minnesota failed in 1960, Humphrey assured Freeman a high post in the New Frontier, and, according to a *Time* magazine article, Freeman pleaded not to be made Secretary of Agriculture. Who could blame him, the article wondered, for "Freeman's job is the most thankless in the U.S. Government." Secretary Benson had called it a "monster" and a "sordid mess." The domain Freeman had to administer in 1963 boasted a \$7 billion a year budget, more than twice the expenditures of the Commerce, Interior, Justice, Labor and State departments combined.¹³

Furthermore, the Agriculture Department in Washington was sprawling and disorganized. It defied "tight administration" with its 4,844 rooms and eight miles of corridors spread over two buildings, not to mention its vast fieldwork. The Department suffered from a "sort of schizophrenia" that caused it to spend significant funds and energy coping with overproduction all the while striving "diligently to increase farm production through research," the paradox at the heart of farm policy. But when Kennedy finally telephoned to offer Freeman "that miserable Agriculture job," Freeman

¹³ "Cover Story," *Time*, April 5, 1963. According to Edward Higbee in *Farms and Farmers in and Urban Age*, although taxpayers had been buying crop surpluses to boost market prices of agricultural commodities for more than three decades, the "net cost to the government did not get out of hand until the late 1950's." While the New Deal programs caused popular outrage by plowing under crops and slaughtering little pigs, "the total costs of these efforts seem infinitesimal by today's standards. For the twenty years, 1932-51 the net losses to the tax-payer for subsidies to stabilize farm prices was only \$6.8 billion, or \$345 million a year." That number jumped to \$22.1 billion for the decade 1952-61, an average of \$2.1 billion a year. A table published in the *Congressional Record* on August 25, 1962 showed that the cost for 1961 alone reached "\$5.2 billion as compared with the 1952 'realized cost' of \$280 million" (141).

accepted. While the *Time* article revealed Freeman's original reluctance to take the position, it also recognized that once he had it, he gave it his all.¹⁴ He would serve in this capacity for the entirety of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, overseeing the federal rural development agenda of both administrations and taking conservation policy in new directions.

One of the Kennedy administration's first moves was to change the name of the Rural Development Program to the Rural Areas Development (RAD) program.¹⁵ While the RAD program incorporated much of the Eisenhower administration Rural Development Program, the new administration sought to politically distance itself from its predecessor and take credit for "new" programs.¹⁶ Nineteen-sixty one "will be a year in which rural America turns away from the dismal trends of the 1950's and begins now

¹⁴ "Cover Story," 21, 22, 24. The article began with a description (and picture) of an intense squash match between Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Freeman. They played frequently and Freeman routinely lost, walking away muttering, "Aw shucks." Yet he kept returning for more. Those matches displayed "qualities useful to any U.S. Secretary of Agriculture—an all-out combativeness coupled with the ability to lose, mutter, 'Aw shucks,' and return to the fray" (21). The article also described Freeman's work ethic, getting up at 6:30 every morning, starting the day with "nip-ups" and at his desk by 8. When he left his desk in the evening he brought home a suitcase of work and went down to a little office in the basement of his suburban Maryland home where he worked until midnight. "Sunday is the only day he reserves for his family," the magazine reported: wife Jane, daughter Constance, 17 and son, Mike, 14. The article also described Freeman's combat experience in World War II, where he nearly lost his life on the South Pacific island of Bougainville at age 25. A Marine first lieutenant, Freeman was leading 30 men through the jungle when a bullet hit him, passing through his throat. He survived, but doctors doubted if he would ever speak again. After prolonged speech therapy, he developed into a "strong-voiced orator." This war time experience no doubt contributed to *Time*'s description of Freeman as a "exceedingly determined man" (24). Freeman was a young World War II veteran, like Kennedy and many others in Kennedy's cabinet. At 42, Freeman was the youngest Secretary of Agriculture up until that time.

¹⁵ Roth, "The Kennedy Administration," 1.

¹⁶ *The Washington Post* recognized that the Kennedy Rural Areas Development program was not entirely new; the current administration would be modifying and expanding upon the foundation of the previous administration. "For some years the Department of Agriculture under Secretary Benson promoted the Rural Development program, and some 200 projects in 40 states are now under way. The present Administration has modified somewhat and added word 'Areas' to the name, but the basic idea continues to be the location of more industry within reach of part-time farmers. Secretary Freeman would like to steer the agricultural end of the depressed-areas program in the same direction." The *Post* speculated that from these beginnings "a new national policy may well emerge" as farms increased in size and fewer people were required to produce food.

to move towards the goal of economic equality with other groups in the nation," Freeman declared at the annual convention of the National Farmers Organization in December 1961.¹⁷

The "new approach" required a reorientation and redirection of USDA agencies' functions as well as a slew of new administration entities to coordinate and ensure "that Department activities will be directed and oriented to make their maximum contribution to economic development of rural areas." These new entities included the Secretary's Public Advisory Committee on Rural Areas Development; the USDA Rural Areas Development Board; the Office of Rural Areas Development; State, trade area and country rural areas development committees, composed of private and public local leaders and organized by the Extension Service; and state and county USDA technical panels, chaired by the State Director of the Farmers Home Administration and composed of field employees of the Soil Conservation Service, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (formerly the AAA), the Rural Electrification Service, the Forest Service and other agencies with field employees.¹⁸

¹⁷ Secretary Freeman's remarks to the National Farmers Organization, 18 December 1961, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Box 1.4/77, Folder "XIB2c(2) Freeman Aug.61--Dec 61"). An internal memorandum explained that "substantively, rural areas development is one of several new approaches inaugurated by Secretary Freeman to focus Department of Agriculture programming for great effectiveness at less total cost." The effort required cooperation with other Federal agencies and state and local governments as well as private enterprises to support locally formulated area development plans, programs and projects to: (1) "Readjust, improve and reorganize the Nation's farm resources to encourage development within 10 years of a permanent pattern of prosperous commercial family farm agriculture"; (2) "Generate maximum feasible new non-farm economic opportunities in rural areas"; and (3) "Provide realistic human assistance to: (a) farm—non-farm labor mobility and land-use shifts and (b) to rural families living on retirement and rehabilitation-in-place units."

¹⁸ "Rural Areas Development—United States Department of Agriculture," 4 December 1961, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, "IVD1 RAD Program." On November 15, 1961, the Secretary issued memorandum No. 1473, establishing an Advisory Committee on Rural Areas Development.

Freeman named John A. Baker chairman of the new Rural Areas Development Board in March of 1961, and he provided the leadership for USDA conservation and rural development policy throughout the 1960s. In July 1962 Baker became the Assistant Secretary for Rural Development and Conservation, tasked with overseeing the USDA's rural development agenda and would remain in that position until January 1969.¹⁹ A native of Paris, Arkansas, he graduated from the University of Arkansas and earned his Masters degree at the University of Wisconsin. In 1937, Baker joined the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington to work as an economist and in 1939 he transferred to Arkansas to become a regional administrator with the Farm Security Administration. After serving in the Navy in the Pacific during World War II and as the director of the National Land Administration with the U.S. military in South Korea, Baker returned to Washington in 1949 where he became an executive assistant to the Undersecretary of Agriculture. In 1951 he joined the National Farmers Union where he stayed until 1961 when he returned to the federal agriculture department as Director of Agricultural Credit, a position that would soon be replaced by his position as Assistant Secretary for Rural Development and Conservation.²⁰ Baker's work with both the Farm Security Administration and the National Farmers Union indicated his sympathies toward small farms and rural development.

Baker defended the relevance and proclaimed the importance of rural America in an urban society, convictions that informed his leadership in the realm of rural conservation. "A great surge forward is stirring throughout America," Baker declared in

¹⁹ Baker's title, Assistant Secretary of Rural Development and Conservation, is just one indicator of how the Freeman administration linked rural development and conservation.

²⁰ "John A. Baker, Obituary," *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1982.

September 1961. "Again in our time, the rural frontier is the seedbed of democracy." Echoing Frederick Jackson Turner's famous frontier thesis, he asserted that historically, rural America "was the new frontier. Today it still is." Enduring democracy was born on America's farms, ranches and forests of the countryside, and in the small towns and cities. "Again, in our time, America's farms, ranches, forests towns and small cities offer a challenge and an opportunity of historical significance to the whole world." Particularly within the context of the Cold War, rural America played a significant role as an example to the rural areas of the rest of the world where the "glittering lure of Soviet false promises finds fertile soil when people see no hope for escape from abject poverty." To be an effective example, Baker warned, the United States had to demonstrate that rural areas development could be promoted by democracy in its own heartland. Rural America had to be strong, its potential supported for the sake of the nation. Rural America, Baker proclaimed, "will preeminently provide the impetus to make the next great advance in civilization."²¹

²¹ "The Rural Frontier at Home and Abroad: Opportunity and Challenge," remarks by John A. Baker, Pine Sluff, Arkansas at the annual Barbeque for Farmers of Southern Areas of Arkansas, 7 September 1961, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Farmers Home Administration loans, Box 1.4/109, Folder, "XIIB2c, Rural Devel. Program Loans, 1961." Frontier language abounded during this time, most famously in the Kennedy Administration calling itself the New Frontier. Flights into space were often contrasted with what was happening on the literal ground—two frontiers. One theme of early 1960s USDA speeches focused on the dangerous gap between technological advancements and social advancements of the age, particularly the nuclear age. In a speech at the National Press Club on April 17, 1961, Freeman mused about the limits of science and technology, which alone could not make a secure society and about the need for adjustment in agricultural resources. "It is the awesome responsibility of this generation to close the gap between scientific progress and social progress sufficiently to make our civilization secure," he said. "The public must understand that any realistic solution to the farm problem requires the adjustment of our agricultural abundance to current domestic and foreign needs and demands," NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, "XIB2c(2) O.L. Freeman April '62."

In a similar vein, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Frank J. Welch told the Society of Agricultural Engineers at Iowa State University on June 27, 1961, "one of the most significant characteristics of our age is the fact that physical, scientific and technological progress is far outrunning

Rural Areas Development and the conservation of rural America's resources were essential for tackling problems, both at home and abroad. The rural areas idea was not new, but was "in a sense...as old as the Nation" Baker observed. It focused on expanding economic opportunities, reorganizing rural America's resources and creating better facilities to build more prosperity and new opportunities. The goal, Baker stated, was to build a firm foundation for permanent prosperity in rural America and to eliminate the causes of rural poverty and economic disadvantage wherever they existed.²²

An early iteration of Rural Areas Development aims included the broad goals of increasing the incomes of rural Americans, improving institutions of health and education and the rapid expansion of job opportunities through stimulating investments "in rural America in all the enterprises and services that make up a modern economy—factories, stores, recreational enterprises, crafts and services." The first aim of the entire agenda

social, political and economic change. No recent event illustrates this fact more dramatically than the manned space flights by our nation and Russia. But man does not yet know how to use this new power. Governments of men do now know how to control this new power for the benefit of mankind. They have developed no social instruments to control the scientific instruments that now boast such incredible precision that they can pinpoint targets on the other side of the earth. This social lag represents a dangerous gap, a gap that must be closed if men on earth are to have any hope for security against the destructive potential of the power they have created." What had this to do with agriculture, he asked? Recognizing the scientific and technological progress in agriculture, which had allowed human societies to pass out of the age of scarcity and into the age of abundance, he also pointed out a dangerous gap in agriculture as well. "Technical and scientific progress has far outrun social and economic change in agriculture as well as in the conquest of space. And I truly believe the social lag represented by the gap between the abundance of food that we can produce and the extent of hunger that exists in spite of this potential for abundance may—in the long run—be far more significant than the gap in space" NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109.

On April 21, 1961, Freeman urged the Independent Bankers Association to take a "renewed and intensified interest in rural area development" declaring it "one of the great remaining frontiers of our nation in our time" (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, "XIB2c(2) O.L. Freeman April '61"). And later that year in "New Frontiers and Wider Horizons," Freeman declared, "the American people, indeed, the people of the entire world, face new frontiers and new challenges today...Our last great frontier—the frontier of human relations—remains to be conquered" (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder "XIB2c(2) Freeman Aug. 61—Dec 61").

²² Baker, "The Rural Frontier at Home and Abroad."

was to “preserve and improve the family farm pattern of American agriculture,” an aim that remained a priority throughout the 1960s even as the rural development agenda widened. Other aims reflected the shifting uses of land and resources: the focus, for example, on the rapid and orderly development of a “wide range of outdoor recreational opportunities to serve the needs of a growing population in the cities and towns and rural areas” and the related goal to “readjust land use, nationwide, to achieve balance” and ensure that each acre and resource was being used for the purposes to which they were best adapted and to meet national needs.²³

The concepts of land-use adjustment and a balanced agriculture were central to the conservation programs of the Kennedy administration. Willard Cochrane promoted the idea of land-use adjustment and played a key role in determining the direction of Kennedy administration farm programs overall. An agricultural economist at the University of Minnesota, Cochrane had also served as Freeman’s principal advisor on agricultural issues during his time as governor. Cochrane accompanied Freeman to Washington and there also served as his principal source of guidance and recommendations on farm policy. As it had Baker, the New Deal also heavily influenced Cochrane—his “interpretation of the liberal vision for society was born during the New Deal” writes Richard A. Levins in his biography of Cochrane, and his main goal was to save the family farm, which he believed was still alive in form but not in spirit by the 1960s.²⁴

²³ “The Aims of RAD,” n.d. NAL, USDA History Collection, Series I, Subseries 4, Addenda: the Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, “IVD Rural Areas Development.”

²⁴ Levins, *Willard Cochrane*, 2, 3. Levins writes that Cochrane carried the “standard of liberalism for President Kennedy in the last serious fight to save the family farm.”

Fundamentally, Cochrane viewed the food production and distribution system the same way he saw the education and health systems in the nation. Their “products” were not “market goods” but rather “basic human rights” that public governance, not a private unregulated system, had a responsibility to guarantee.²⁵ Though he ultimately came to believe price supports needed to be abolished, during his time in Washington, Cochrane asserted that a policy of price supports made stringent production controls unavoidable, a conviction that formed the heart of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations’ commodity farm programs.²⁶ Privately, Cochrane worried most about the “tide of technology sweeping the heartland.” He saw new technology “obliterating” the agriculture he had grown up with and believed that the most essential reform was to control technology itself. Price and supply control would only help the family farm, he insisted, if it was accompanied by a way to control technology—an idea that was not

²⁵ Levins, *Willard Cochrane*, 78.

²⁶ “Cover Story,” *Time*, 25. “We offer the farmers price supports in return for cuts in production,” observed Cochrane in the *Time* feature on Secretary Freeman. “It’s a mutual thing. If they don’t want effective controls, that’s their prerogative. They can vote them out at any time they choose. But it’s not fair for them to ask for prices at present levels if they are not willing to assume responsibility for cutting production.” *The Wall Street Journal* columnist Paul Duke addressed the impossibility of the government guaranteeing high prices and the freedom to produce. “For all its dallying,” he remarked, “Congress seems inevitably headed toward accepting the challenges laid down by two successive Secretaries of Agriculture. These challenges of Ezra Taft Benson, Republican, and Orville L. Freeman, Democrat, agreed on just one crucial point: The Government cannot go on forever giving farmers both artificially high prices and freedom to produce. Secretary Benson’s proposals essentially aimed at denying them the former. Secretary Freeman’s planning basically aims at denying them the latter. Congress, unwilling to accept either harsh prescription, has year after year voted a mishmash—headed neither toward a consistent low-price, free-market agriculture nor toward a tightly regimented high-price farm economy. Yet the course of historic events now makes it practically certain the law-makers will at least turn down either one road or the other” (*The Congressional Record*, August 8, 1962, p. 14908, qtd in *Farms and Farmers in an Urban Age*, 137). The reluctance to go in either direction was reflected in farmers’ dissatisfaction with both administrations: “Benson made a Democrat out of me and now Freeman is turning me back into a Republican,” writes Higbee. Those farmers put in the most difficult position were the 1.3 million small family farmers who relied on labor rather than capital investment in technologies and for whom price supports did little (*Farms and Farmers*, 137).

popular and never came to pass in a nation with a love affair with technological
 “progress.”²⁷

One way to create a more balanced agriculture was to adjust agricultural land-use and resources. The abundance of farm production, Cochrane argued, gave policymakers an unprecedented freedom of choice in how to approach and use agricultural lands. Cochrane believed that America suffered from an “imperfect pattern of land-use” and in the summer of 1961 attempted to give the “rough dimensions of the land use adjustment problem that can be expected to accompany continued progress in farm technology.”²⁸ Now was the time to look at major categories of land use with the following questions in mind: could the nation get more of its crop production on lands best suited to cultivation? What were the prospective needs for cropland in the future? How much cropland should be kept in a ready reserve for emergency use? How much additional land could be advantageously used in trees, and finally, how much land was needed to meet growing recreational needs?²⁹

Cochrane estimated that by 1980, the United States would have 84 million surplus acres of average quality cropland that could be made available for new uses or be used more effectively in current uses.³⁰ A ratcheted up, or more aggressive Food for Peace

²⁷ Levins, *Willard Cochrane*, 42-3.

²⁸ “Memorandum: Major Land Use Readjustments—Needs and Potentials” Willard Cochrane to the Secretary, 15 June 1961, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-1, Folder, “IB1 Land.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1-6. Cochrane explained that of the total 458 million acres of cropland in the 50 United States, 442 million were in use with 16 million in conservation reserve programs. Forty-eight million of those acres were on erosive, marginal lands and needed to be taken out of cropping somehow and 10 million of those acres would be lost to nonfarm uses by 1980. Lands used for pasture in 1959 totaled 635 million acres with a potential addition of 21 million acres through the retirement of poor cropland acres and a potential loss of six million acres to nonfarm uses. Forest land was estimated at 733 million acres in 1959. Cochrane cited

Program might permit retention of 2.3 million acres in crops, and an expanded program for outdoor recreation "might take up another 30 million." The other acres could be moved into a national forest or a grassland reserve for unexpected future needs.

At the same time, through these new uses, the nation could derive secondary benefits from recreation, wildlife, and watershed protection, Cochrane suggested, though he fully admitted that while recreational land use would expand greatly in the years to come, "there are no well-established estimates of need and no adequate policy and program to fulfill those needs." The development of a coordinated, comprehensive land and water use program that would give proper attention to the economic adjustment of land resources among competing public and private uses was required. Establishing that program and federal machinery by building on Cochrane's ideas and the rural development foundation already established was what the Kennedy administration set out to do.

*

The agricultural land-use adjustment initiative comprised part of the Kennedy administration's broader conservation agenda beyond the USDA that included implementing the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission findings and focusing on outdoor recreation resources; increased public lands preservation, including

estimates from a 1959 U.S. Senate Select Committee Report on National Water Resources that argued for additional cropland acres to meet America's food needs in 1980. Considering trends in increased output per acre, Cochrane did not agree with the Senate Select Committee's estimates. Instead of needing additional acres for cropland by 1980, if the trends in crop output per acre from 1950 to 1960 continued, he estimated that "we would have about 84 million acres of cropland and pasture available in 1980 for additional grassland, forestry, wildlife or recreation." The great variation in the characteristics, locations and possible alternative uses of those lands "suggest that an effective land use adjustment program would need to employ many different techniques and approaches," Cochrane concluded.

support for federal wilderness protection; urban renewal and open space conservation; watershed conservation and attacking water pollution and waste; more sustainable timber and forestry practices; and the wise-use of technology—all subjects Kennedy addressed in his 1962 message on conservation to Congress.³¹ Kennedy relied on Udall and Freeman's leadership to direct this wide-sweeping conservation agenda that addressed the needs of an expanding urban society.

Efficient conservation and utilization of the land were critical to solving some of the nation's basic problems. Although he had little to no personal interest in agriculture, Kennedy could not ignore the industry's problems and promise—both of which centered in large part around agriculture's abundance. He paid attention to the traditional agendas of soil and watershed conservation that had their roots in the 1930s, but also addressed the newer land-use adjustment ideas bubbling up in his administration as potential solutions to agricultural and other national problems. The proper management of agricultural resources to meet the triple goals of increased farm income, lower cost to the taxpayer and reduced farm surpluses continued to be “one of the most difficult problems confronting the nation,” Kennedy told Congress during his annual agriculture message in January 1962. The nation was now faced with unprecedented opportunities to take advantage of unneeded agricultural acres for a “wide range of recreational, aesthetic, and economic purposes,” Kennedy declared. Land use changes were not only important for balanced production, but also because they would “supply the growing demand for outdoor recreational areas and wildlife promotion, for woodlots and forests, and for

³¹ John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to Congress on Conservation,” 1 March 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

grazing.”³² Toward this end he recommended legislation to encourage a comprehensive survey of land uses, to research the conversion of land to alternate purposes, and to initiate a series of pilot and demonstration land-use projects.

This “effective land use” program was a fundamental part of the administration’s overall goals for Food and Agriculture in the 1960s: Abundance, Balance, Conservation and Development, or ABCD, that Kennedy desired to see enacted in legislation. The new land-use and conservation measures would not only target the needs of commercial agriculture, Kennedy explained, but also a much needed “rural renewal” program that would assist small farmers and rural communities and end rural poverty. The ABCD approach outlined a comprehensive, “long-range” program to replace the current “patchwork” of “short-run emergency measures” that were not getting the job done on any front.³³

In February, Freeman built upon Kennedy’s address in his testimony before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry on the administration’s Program for Food and Agriculture in the 1960s.³⁴ While Freeman discussed the problems that continually plagued commercial agriculture in the age of overproduction, he spent nearly half of his testimony on the new initiatives of the Kennedy farm program that focused on

³² John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to Congress on Agriculture,” 31 January, 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Testimony of the Secretary of Agriculture, Orville L. Freeman on the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, S. 2766 before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Tuesday, February 20, 1962,” NAL, USDA History Collection, Series I, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, “XIB2c(2) Orville L. Freeman, Jan-Feb ‘62.” Freeman called the revolution in American agricultural productivity a “real and non-reversible” revolution.

conservation, land-use adjustment and the potential for recreational opportunities on America's farmlands.

These measures would help to not only solve commercial agricultural problems, but many other societal problems as well, Freeman reiterated. In particular, one issue that had been building since the 1950s would play a "key role" in the 1960s farm program, and that was the "great unmet need for land for purposes of outdoor recreation, for wildlife habitat, for areas of natural open space around our cities." The ORRRC had described this problem as one of the nation's greatest needs for the future. The future would bring a tremendous growth in population, increased proportion of leisure and rising consumer incomes—and with all this, more demands on the land. Now was the time to design a comprehensive land conservation program with eyes toward the future.

One of the main issues in outdoor recreation management that the nation faced was that the majority of outdoor recreation resources were far from centers of population. Farms could remedy this problem because much of the nation's privately owned cropland was near population centers. Some of this land, while marginal for farming, presented "almost limitless possibilities for conservation and recreation use," Freeman advocated, and "adjustment in the use of such land could result in unmeasurable benefits for both its owners and the nearby urban population." Farmers had produced the abundance of food and fiber that formed the foundation of the nation's growth and high standard of living. Over time, however, American society's needs had shifted, from food and fiber to outdoor recreation. Now farmers could contribute "materially to bringing about an abundance in this field, too," in which there now existed a serious scarcity. Revealing his

enthusiasm for this agenda and concept, Freeman declared that the potential and “opportunities for farmers to increase their own incomes and meet real needs by developing, on their own land, facilities for fishing, camping, picnicking and other outdoor recreation challenge the imagination.”³⁵ Both urban and rural America—the entire nation—would benefit from such an agenda.

The legislation the administration proposed now before Congress provided the USDA new authority to harness and shape the nation’s privately owned croplands and farms that held potential for wildlife conservation, for hunting and fishing, and for many other kinds of outdoor recreation. It would enable the Department to initiate a series of pilot and demonstration land-use projects that would include payments to farmers for changes in cropping systems and land uses, and for other measures to conserve and develop soil, water, forest, wildlife and recreational resources. Any farmer could participate. To assist local organizations in the operation and maintenance of a reservoir or other area for public recreation, the Secretary could bear or share the costs of the land, easements, or rights-of-way acquired by the local organization for that purpose. The Secretary could also advance funds to local organizations for acquisition of land, easements, or rights-of-way that were “necessary to preserve sites for reservoirs or other areas from encroachment by residential, commercial, industrial, or other development.” With such programs “to encourage this adjustment in land use, and to encourage the conversion of cropland to grass and trees,” multiple good deeds could be accomplished.

³⁵ Ibid, 5.

Farm income could be improved at the same time that the programs contributed to the "welfare and the interests of the people of the entire nation."³⁶

These new conservation measures comprised a central part of the rural areas development efforts of the USDA because they were designed as a means to improve rural communities and raise farm income. The USDA had already begun the effort with its RAD program, and the proposed Food and Agriculture program before Congress would expand that initiative. "Land use adjustment will be an integral part of a program of rural renewal," Freeman stated. The land use adjustment agenda was "a program to bring new life and health to all of our rural communities, and particularly to those where rural poverty has been especially critical." These new measures were designed to encourage the formation of economically viable family sized farms, and facilitate the diversion of land to recreation, conservation, the growing of trees, and wildlife preservation as well as new industrial and commercial enterprises, better facilities, and improved educational opportunities. Rural renewal was just as important, Freeman reminded Congress, "in strengthening the values of American life as urban renewal programs in our cities." Rural renewal was critical to *national* welfare, not just rural welfare.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid. Title I of the proposed act contained amendments to the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment act, the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act. It gave the Secretary of Agriculture new authority to promote changes in existing conservation land use and watershed and flood protection by (1) "Acquiring land not currently needed for agricultural use to be developed and used for public recreation and protection of fish and wildlife"; (2) "By long-term agreements with farm operators and owners" (not longer than 15 years); and (3) "By providing assistance to local organizations in acquiring, developing, and maintaining selected reservoirs or other areas in watershed projects for public recreation and fish and wildlife."

³⁷ Ibid, 18.

Freeman's testimony painted an optimistic vision of the future. This future included not only lower government costs and higher farm incomes, but also new uses of resources to meet "urgent, but presently neglected, needs" of all the people of the United States. No longer would acres lay idle or be wasted by the production of things that could not be used. Instead they would provide "wholesome outdoor recreation for which there is great need." The agricultural land-use adjustment and conservation program would also help to conquer rural poverty and realize the promise of rural renewal. A sustainable balanced agricultural economy would emerge in which federal government programs and payments would gradually diminish and eventually become unnecessary and which would be sufficiently flexible and productive to allow Americans to "continue to enjoy in the future the blessings of abundance made possible by continued scientific and technological progress."³⁸ Improved uses of agricultural productivity to relieve suffering and to promote economic development abroad would also be enacted in the form of stepped up school lunch programs, a pilot food stamp program and a more effective Food for Peace program.³⁹

The vision described would only work, however, if accompanied by a concerted effort to control production and reduce surplus in the commercial agricultural sector. The programs for "rural development, for better use of our land resources, and for expanding utilization of our abundance" could only make the maximum contribution to a

³⁸ Ibid, 19.

³⁹ In his article, "Drafted into the War on Poverty: USDA Food and Nutrition Programs, 1961-1969," (*Agricultural History* 64: 2 (1990): 154-166), Norwood Allen Kerr explores the food programs and the developing national attack on poverty that began under Kennedy and crystalized under Johnson's War on Poverty. In his speeches on agriculture, Kennedy expressed high hopes for the food stamp program as well as the Food for Peace program; these programs, too, would serve multiple goals—eradicate the ills of hunger and poverty, support Cold War aims and deal with the ever-problematic agricultural surplus.

comprehensive farm program if accompanied by “measures to achieve a balance in the production of those agricultural commodities that are now in substantial surplus.”⁴⁰ The Kennedy “ABCD” farm program proposals to deal with feed grains, wheat and dairy products were all crafted to achieve that balance, as were the new initiatives in land-use adjustment and conservation. All these components needed to be seen and implemented as a whole agenda, not piecemeal. “Bright prospects,” Freeman asserted, “will result from the total implementation of the entire proposed program.”⁴⁰

The Kennedy administration charged that a problematic and unbalanced situation had developed in the 1950s in rural and agricultural America, and that its farm program marked a new, promising beginning—a new frontier. A “fresh start” began in 1961—toward better lives for rural people, toward better farm programs and toward a more effective use of agriculture and rural America’s resources for the public good. The 1960s could “well be *the critical decade* in determining how wisely our land will be used for generations to come,” Freeman concluded.⁴¹

Promoting the Land-Use Adjustment Conservation Agenda

The Department of Agriculture began to promote the Kennedy agenda to the wider public in the spring of 1962. Outdoor recreation “can be a major, salable product

⁴⁰ “Testimony,” 18-19.

⁴¹ United States Department of Agriculture, *Food and Agriculture: A Program for the 1960s* (Washington, DC: GPO, March 1962), 8, 9, 13. As Freeman had reiterated in his testimony before Congress, these new developments would need to accompany improvements in agriculture overall and never lose sight of the big picture and larger aims of reform. Programs “for better use of our land must go hand in hand with a program to provide better opportunities for the people who live on the land,” the Department concluded. Programs of agriculture needed to move in the direction of eliminating poverty and be directed toward providing a better life for the 54 million people who lived in rural areas. “We are determined,” it proclaimed, with the optimism and ambition of the sixties, “to remove the blight of rural poverty from our land within this generation.”

of privately owned land,” explained *Markets Unlimited: Outdoor Recreation—A Major Product on America’s Farms*. “Our farms are producing more food and fiber than we can use at home and market abroad.” So why not use those acres for products that Americans *did* need: more new areas for picnicking, camping, and hiking, and more wildlife and fish, more water for fishing, swimming, boating, and hunting. Farms and ranches could be developed for “multiple-use” just like national forests and grasslands and in the process cut down on surplus. Everyone would benefit from the growing demand for outdoor recreation. New recreation businesses would provide rural people with new jobs and sources of income, while at the same time providing urban people with “relaxation and pleasure.” This land-use adjustment further made sense considering the average American family preferred simple outdoor recreation activities to more complex ones, like climbing mountains.⁴²

More broadly, these initiatives would provide the nation tools to manage changes in the American countryside that science and technology had wrought by prioritizing long-range over short-term adjustment. There was “obvious reason—and need—for this new approach,” Freeman told an audience during the spring of 1962. Over the previous decade and a half, the nation’s policies had focused too narrowly on the problem of overproduction and not enough on the development of long-range tools of adjustment for land and society. In this oversight, Freeman acknowledged, agriculture was not alone. Industry had experienced similar problems in its adjustment to the impact of technological change—particularly automation—and only recently had efforts begun to

⁴² U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Markets Unlimited: Outdoor Recreation—A Major Product of American Farms* (Washington, DC: GPO, March 1962), 2, 10-11.

help those whose jobs in cities had “been replaced by a machine.”⁴³ Agriculture joined industry in seeking “new ways of living” with dynamic forces of change by proposing more long-range problem-solving techniques to meet the crisis of abundance.⁴⁴

Indeed, the new initiatives promoted long-range and long-term conservation and land-use adjustment measures in contrast to the shorter-term conservation and land-diversion techniques of the commodity programs. The pilot programs for major land-use shifts within agriculture, “are intended to explore new avenues of land-use adjustment and point the way toward desirable long-run programs,” Willard Cochrane explained in a memorandum to the secretary in March 1962. In this, they differed in important ways from the commodity program land diversion activities, which applied to producers of specified surplus crops and kept land out of production on a short-term basis and for the purposes of keeping commodity prices high. The new land-use adjustment agenda added features to continuing Department programs for cost-sharing and overall conservation farm planning, but for distinctly different public good purposes than the commodity conservation programs.⁴⁵ President Kennedy reiterated this philosophy when he discussed the pilot and land-use projects. “As the pilot plan is evaluated and a permanent program for land use is developed,” he stated, “it will be possible for our supply

⁴³ Automation hit laborers hard in the 1950s across all sectors of the economy—from the mining industries of West Virginia to the auto industry and agriculture. As in agriculture, little was done about unemployment from automation until the 1960s, and even then, Great Society programs proved little able to help for a variety of reasons, a story Thomas J. Sugrue explores in depth in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

⁴⁴ “Project Opportunity,” Remarks by Freeman to the National Federation of Grain Cooperatives, 3 April 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, “XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Program loans 1961.”

⁴⁵ Willard Cochrane to the Secretary, “Preliminary Statement on Pilot Programs of Land-Use Adjustment and Development” 27 March 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, John A. Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-1, Folder, “IB1b Diversion.”

management effort to place less emphasis on temporary diversion of acreage from production of specific crops and more on the permanent utilization of acreage to fulfill other public needs.”⁴⁶

In addition to long-range conservation planning and goals, also fundamental to the new initiatives and pilot programs was an underlying guiding philosophy of adjusting rural land-use to meet urban and suburban needs.⁴⁷ The new land-use agenda depended on direct connections between urban and suburban dwellers and rural America—not just a connection that occurred at the grocery store. The new agricultural program “promises to accomplish things which no other farm program has achieved,” Freeman declared. If the program was successful, “there will be increasingly less heard about surplus and subsidy, and progressively more about common sense and cooperation between town and

⁴⁶ Freeman, “Project Opportunity.”

⁴⁷ Cochrane, “Preliminary Statement,” 12. The integrated vision of urban and rural America motivated Cochrane’s development of the pilot programs that he could see emerging from the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act. What Cochrane termed the “Town and Country Recreation Program” would tie together the “needs of urban areas for open-air recreation” with nearby farming resources. The urban population, he hypothesized, would benefit from directly participating in the development of recreation facilities and the related “enhancement and protection of rural scenic areas.” Farmers could enjoy the scenic and recreational facilities developed and would financially benefit from federal cost-sharing and loans for the improvement of land and water resources. Farmers would also realize some “direct income benefits” as an increased flow of urban visitors would make possible the establishment of riding stables, roadside produce stands and other enterprises.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Cochrane envisioned other groups, such as boys and girls clubs, nature organizations, civic associations and others participating in the development of these facilities and agenda.

Cochrane also outlined a potential “Sportsmen and Farmers Cooperative Program,” an arrangement between sportsmen’s organizations and farmers of a community to “promote more hunting and fishing, attract more sportsmen to the area and provide a source of income for farmers.” A local sportsmen’s group, the USDA and around 30 farmers in a locality would then develop a joint agreement that allowed hunters and fishermen onto specified areas of farmers’ lands. The sportsmen’s group would agree to pay a stipulated fee to each farmer, based on the recreational potential of his land, which could be raised from local business firms that would potentially benefit from the influx of sportsmen, or a permit system could be worked out. Compensation for damages would have to be worked out between the sportsmen and the farmers. ASCS would cost-share on wildlife habitat improvement practices. Cochrane also discussed grassland farming, family forest, small watershed recreation and rural renewal programs. anticipating all programs together would cost the government \$20,262,000 in its first year.

country.”⁴⁸ Geographer Edward Higbee reflected on these new connections. “Perhaps neither urbanite nor farmer realizes how significantly increases in population and shifts in the patterns of settlement have altered forever the land requirements of town and country,” he observed. The “reassignment of land from old uses to new ones which fit the needs of a fast growing urban society promises to be one of the most critical problems of resource allocation in the future.”⁴⁹

The conservation program proposed by the administration would make possible a wider choice of economic opportunity in rural America, allowing those who wished to stay in their communities to do so, without being “compelled by the harsh dictate of economic pressure to look to the big city for jobs with decent incomes” and provide more Americans access to the agrarian outdoors. Instead of building more and more facilities for the storage of unused commodities, the nation could begin to build the necessary

⁴⁸ Freeman, “Project Opportunity.”

⁴⁹ Higbee, *Farms and Farmers*, 97, 111. “It seems that confinement in cities and suburbs has imbued people with a greater desire to find occasional release in America’s great outdoors,” he observed. “Fortunately this new interest in the public domain comes at a time when agriculture finds itself overextended in commitments to land resources and capable of raising bigger crops and more livestock on smaller acreages at greater profit” (111). In a document in possession of the Department of Agriculture, written in July 1962, Higbee observed “one of the urgent problems facing our country is to adjust agriculture resources to better meet the needs of all the people—rural and urban. This calls for significant adjustments of land and water uses over a period of time, consistent with orderly and economic progress. Many of the services of USDA have already been reoriented to the changing patterns of rural and urban, to farm and non-farm people. The USDA is dedicated to serving the needs of rural America as a foremost objective but in a manner that will provide food, fiber, water, and improved living opportunities for urban America, too... Thus, enhanced development in rural agriculture, industry and recreation must accompany the expanding national economy.” The USDA’s interest in developing recreation businesses on farms, he continued, stemmed from “four primary reasons”: “(1) It offers a chance to provide sorely needed additional income to the hardpressed farmers of America and, at the same time, enables them to stay on their farms; (2) it can aid in diverting cropland to a more remunerative use for the owner which can later, if and when needed, be returned to cultivation; (3) it provides an urgently needed public service; and (4) it keeps the land in private ownership and provides more tax revenue to the community” (Memo by Edward Higbee, 10 July 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, John A. Baker Files).

facilities to “meet the stored up demand for recreation and the beauty of country life,” Freeman argued.⁵⁰

The Department of Agriculture took steps that summer toward queuing up the new conservation program. In July 1962, Kennedy nominated John Baker as Assistant Secretary of Rural Development and Conservation, an action that Freeman called a “significant appointment—another step in our strong program for rural development tied to the effective use of land and the development of alternative land uses.”⁵¹ Placed under Baker’s direction were the Farmer Cooperative Service, the Farmers Home Administration, the Forest Service, the Office of Rural Areas Development, the Rural Electrification Administration and the Soil Conservation Service. The creation of Baker’s office demonstrated that the “program that’s set down in our food and agricultural program for the ‘60’s by way of developing alternative land uses and alternative sources of income in rural areas is going to receive full, concentrated attention from this Department,” the USDA declared in a press release.⁵²

To make the programs that focused on the alternative use of recreation effective when they became a reality, the Department created a Task Force on Income-Producing Recreation Enterprises on Farm Land in order to review the “current status of recreation use of agricultural land” and to report on the possibilities of income-producing recreation

⁵⁰ Freeman, “Project Opportunity.”

⁵¹ “President Nominates Baker as Assistant Secretary,” Rural Areas Development Newsletter, August 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, “XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Program 1961.”

⁵² Ibid.

enterprise on farms and ranches.⁵³ At the same time, the Department took pains to focus on the centrality and importance of the family farm in farm policy. The National Public Advisory Committee on Rural Areas recommended that the Secretary establish a "Family Farm Policy Review" that would require an annual review of agriculture policies and programs to ensure that the "family farm will continue to be an important part of American agriculture."⁵⁴ In July, Freeman established the "Family Farm Policy Study," which reiterated that the policy of Congress and the Department of Agriculture was to "recognize the importance of the family farm as an efficient unit of production and as an economic base for towns and cities in rural areas and encourage, promote and strengthen this form of farm enterprise."⁵⁵ The new agricultural program supported this core mission, Freeman asserted, for the family farm was at the center of Rural Areas Development.

On September 27, 1962, the Congress passed the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, authorizing the administration's ABCD agricultural program and giving the Department of Agriculture the green light to begin implementing its new conservation provisions. Upon signing the bill, Kennedy remarked that he was "especially pleased by the pilot program in the bill to explore means of turning farm lands to nonagricultural purposes," and which broadened the authority of the existing watershed and lending

⁵³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Rural Recreation: A new family-farm business*, Report of the Task Force on Income-Producing Recreation Enterprises on Farm Land (Washington, DC: GPO, September 1962), v.

⁵⁴ "Rural Areas Development Advisors urge Annual Family Farm Policy Review," USDA press release, 31 May 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, "XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Program 1961."

⁵⁵ Secretary's Memorandum No. 1505, "Family Farm Policy Study," 6 July 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, John A. Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-4, Folder, "III Family Farm Programs."

programs of the USDA. "These may be," he continued, "the most important provisions of this legislation" because they opened up "possibilities for constructive and continuing programs of multiple use of private and public conservation projects, expanded open air spaces around cities, and economic development of some of our less developed areas."⁵⁶

The 1962 Food and Agriculture Act

As the administration had proposed, Title I of the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act, "Land-Use Adjustment," provided for the conversion of cropland to long-term alternative uses, including recreation.⁵⁷ The general purpose of the new "Cropland Conversion Program," to be rolled out in 1963, was to "improve family farm income by promoting the conservation and better economic use of farm and ranch land through agreements with farm and ranch owners providing for changes in cropping systems and land uses and for practices or measures needed to conserve and develop soil, water, forest, wildlife, and

⁵⁶ John F. Kennedy, "Remarks upon Signing the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962," 27 September 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu. A draft of his statement on signing the bill dated 26 September 1962 went even further, making the bold statement: "In the long run, when commodity problems become less pressing, and when the surpluses have been contained, these programs to strengthen rural America may far outshadow in importance the measures relating to farm commodities, and will stand as landmarks of constructive and forward looking legislation" (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda: John A. Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, "VIA1b(6) Food and Agriculture Act of 1962").

⁵⁷ "Basic Policy Guidelines and Assignments of Responsibility for Development and Administration of Program to Promote the Conservation and Economic Use of Land Under Title I, section 101, Food and Agriculture Act of 1962," NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, "VIA1b(6) Food and Agriculture Act of 1962." This memorandum further laid out the basic policies and objectives for the "Long Range Land Use Adjustment Programs." These included: "(1) to permanently convert to other uses land regularly used in the production of crops but not suited to that purpose; (2) to permanently convert to other uses land regularly used in the production of crops but suitable for only occasional cultivation; and (3) to convert to other uses land regularly used in the production of crops that is suitable for, but is not currently needed for crops."

recreation resources.”⁵⁸ The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) was responsible for developing and administering the Cropland Conversion Program at the national, state and county levels. National programs and regulations would be developed by the Agricultural Conservation Program Development group, consisting of the ASCS, the Economic Research Service, the Forest Service and the Soil Conservation Service. The Farmers Home Administration, the Extension Service and other Department agencies with interests affecting the programs would be consulted in program development.⁵⁹

The Department of Agriculture defined the priorities for choosing recreation projects under the Cropland Conversion Program and the acceptable ways that cropland could be converted for recreation use. First priority went to “family-farm type projects” in which the farmer carried out the recreation program in conjunction with regular farming operations. Second priority went to projects seeking to convert the entire farm to recreation use, but still maintained family operation and third priority went to group

⁵⁸ “Draft of Proposed Regulations” for the 1963 Cropland Conversion Program, 21 December 1962, p. 1, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-1, Folder, “IB1b Diversion.”

⁵⁹ Pilot projects established under Title I would be determined by the ASCS in consultation with the Rural Areas Development Board. Through the pilot counties, officials sought to provide experience in the: “application of long-term land use adjustment programs to expand grasslands on farms and ranches”; “application of long-term land use adjustment programs to expand and improve woodlands on the farms;” and “application of a program to develop recreational use of private lands” for a complete conversion of those lands from present agricultural use and in conjunction with other agricultural uses. The Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service would be responsible for the technical phases of the programs, while the ASCS state and county committees would oversee day-to-day administration of the programs. Farmers who chose to participate would need to apply and then would be offered transition or adjustment payments and cost-sharing for materials, services or other assistance needed. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation county committees were tasked with enacting the agreements with farmers and ranchers, which would be developed in cooperation with local soil conservation specialists (“Memorandum of Understanding—Administration of Title I, Section 101, Food and Agriculture Act of 1962,” NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, “VIA1b(6) Food and Agriculture Act of 1962”).

enterprises involving two or more farm families who planned to continue to live on and operate the farms for agricultural use in addition to recreation.⁶⁰

In terms of acceptable recreation conversions, a farmer could build horseshoe, badminton, basketball, tennis and fencing courts, baseball and softball fields, nature, hiking and riding trails and golf courses. The government would support the building of open shelters that included fireplaces and picnic tables, but would not finance a clubhouse, recreation halls, woodsheds, canteens or snack bars. For swimming development, farmers could use federal funds to build a wading area and dock, but not for a beach, showers, bathhouse or life saving equipment. Building an archery and gunnery range was acceptable if it met certain conditions and the same held for skiing development.⁶¹ In December 1962, the Department issued a press release, advertising that a limited number of farmers in every state would be eligible for cost-share assistance in converting cropland to recreation use in 1963 as part of the new land use conversion program that "will be part of the long-range program of land-use adjustment" under the Food and Agriculture Act. The Department hoped that farmers would apply conservation practices to develop fishing, swimming, hunting boating, picnicking, camping and other recreational uses of the land.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Proposed Basic Policies Applicable to Recreation Projects: 1963 Cropland Conversion Program," NAL, USDA History Files, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-1, Folder, "IB1b Diversion."

⁶¹ For example, shaping, obstruction removal, trail development ponds were acceptable uses for federal funds, but creating ski lodges, canteens and dormitories were not.

⁶² "USDA Announces Assistance for Conversion of Cropland to Recreation Use," USDA press release, 4 December 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, "XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Program loans 1961."

In addition to the Cropland Conversion Program, the Food and Agriculture Act authorized another other avenue for farmland conversion and recreation development in Title IV—the expansion of Farmers Home Administration (FHA) loan authority to include loans for income-producing recreation development.⁶³ Since Farmers Home Administration loans directly serviced farmers with low-incomes unable to get financing elsewhere, this loan program sought to increase family farm income and support working family farms as its first priority. Unlike the Cropland Conversion Program, which allowed farmers to convert their entire farms to recreational enterprises, the FHA loans to individual farmers required that the borrower continue to remain in traditional agriculture, receiving a “substantial” portion of his or her income from farming.⁶⁴ Loans for recreational development under Title IV were intended only to supplement farm income and made only to farmers and ranchers who “personally manage and operate not larger than family farms.” Furthermore, the loan program required that the borrower derive income from the recreational enterprise, emphasizing again its income-production goal; a farmer could not, for example, build a recreational facility just for him and his family to enjoy.⁶⁵

⁶³ Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, Pub. L. No. 87-704, 76 Stat. 631-2 (1962). Title IV, “General Provisions,” amended the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act of 1961. Title IV specifically authorized this expansion of “shifts in land use including recreational facilities.”

⁶⁴ “FHA Accepting Loan Applications for Recreation Enterprises,” USDA Press Release, 6 November 1962, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, “XIIIB2 Loans under FHA Program.” The release gave figures for the loans. The maximum individual loan for operating costs of recreational enterprises was \$35,000 and for real estate loans, \$60,000 at an interest rate of 5 percent, though the average loan turned out to be much lower. An association could borrow up to \$500,000 to finance community recreational developments from appropriated FHA funds and up to \$1 million from FHA-insured funds.

⁶⁵ Farmers Home Administration, *Loans to family farmers for recreation enterprises* (Washington, DC: GPO, June 1963).

In addition to the individual farm loans, the Farmers Home Administration loan program also included loans for community organizations and associations to develop large-scale recreational resources. These community-scale developments could include swimming pools, golf courses, little league parks, ski slopes, camping facilities, and even the construction of access roads and parking lots.⁶⁶ In support of this concept of community development, the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act also authorized the creation of Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) districts to promote multi-county wide area land conservation and land use planning efforts directed by newly created local RC&D districts. Recreation constituted a vital part of these regional conservation and land-use planning approaches and the regional planning concept was heavily endorsed by Freeman, who would only see more potential in it as the 1960s wore on.

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Congress passed the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act with overall support from its members for the new conservation agenda that it contained. Representative Delbert L. Latta (R-OH) saw the hunting and outdoor possibilities on the flat land of his district's landscape in northwestern Ohio being very attractive to farmers, as well as to sportsmen because they had seen a gradual decrease of good hunting areas. Mr. D.R. (Billy) Matthews of Florida (D-FL) found the land-use adjustment concept to be "most imaginative" and filled with "tremendous possibilities." He informed Freeman that the

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Loans to Associations for Shifts in Land Use* (Washington, DC: GPO, October 1962).

recreation idea would go far toward "filling the very necessary gap" that the eastern U.S. faced with outdoor recreation resources. Congressman W. Pat Jennings of Virginia (D-VA) found the idea of building golf courses or little league fields on farms to be a "little farfetched" but had observed that golf courses often brought in more income than farming.⁶⁷ Charles B. Hoeven (R-IA) of Iowa was not so persuaded, however. He recognized that small farms were fast disappearing in the midst of an agricultural revolution and parts of the bill proposed a "grandiose program for the development of recreation areas." But he could not quite see how that would benefit the small farmer.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Food and Agriculture Act of 1962: Hearings on H.R. 10010, Before the Committee on Agriculture*, 87th Congress (1962), 176-77, 188-90. Freeman responded to Jennings saying, "I recognize that I am subject to ridicule on this, but I think that your observation is pertinent." He was aware that the idea might seem silly to people, or would take time to sink in. At the White House Conference on Conservation a few months later, Freeman observed that opposition to the farm recreation idea had "generally been an attitude that said, 'I can't see a farmer building a golf course' or, 'what is a farmer doing in the recreation business?'" It was mainly an inability to think in new ways. "They think of a farmer producing corn or wheat or soybeans or pigs. The idea that farmers are going to produce recreation is something that is just a little bit new, and they can't quite get hold of it." (White House Conference on Conservation, *Official Proceedings*, 23).

⁶⁸ *Food and Agriculture Act of 1962: Hearings*, 516. The majority of Congressional concerns over the program centered on the ability of the federal government to purchase land and the proper realm of federal authority. The legislation amended the New Deal era Bankhead-Jones Act, which authorized the federal government to purchase submarginal lands. Certain members of Congress worried about the power of the federal government to "buy anything on God's earth," in the words of Congressman W.R. Poage (D-TX). The Farm Bureau also expressed this concern, and was generally dismissive of the whole idea, believing the measures would have "very little effect on either the surplus problem or farm income." It did recommend, however, that Congress hold separate hearings on the appropriateness of the agenda, because "while it is appropriate for the National Government to maintain national parks to protect the public interest in areas that have unique, scenic or other recreational values," the responsibility for providing local recreational facilities "should rest with the State and local governments and private enterprise."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce agreed, opposing any "expansion of the authority of the Secretary to enter into long-term agreements with farmers for land retirement, cropping, land uses and practices, including soil and water conservation, forestry, wildlife, and recreational development," because it believed that this extended "too much authority to the Secretary over the scope and soundness of such agreements." In response to such concerns, Freeman compared the land acquisition provision under the amendment to the Bankhead-Jones Act to urban renewal programs that purchased land, trying to show the similarity between the purchase of slums and the purchase of submarginal land by the government. Perhaps more important, however, was the reality that the majority of the land-use adjustment agenda required that the land remain in the hands of the private landowner, the farmer. Two of the ultimate goals were increased income for individual farmers and support for rural communities, not increased land ownership by the federal government.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) saw positive potential in the agenda, viewing it as a way to help more farmers stay on the land because they could engage in additional activities beyond farming. Anticipating a debate that would come to grow in the mid 1960s, the organization did not see any benefit to taking people off the land and sending them "into cities to go on relief rolls." Instead, a much better program was the one outlined in the Food and Agriculture Act that tried to "improve rural America and all of its resources," and which used the people that lived in the area to help improve the conservation of soil and water and outdoor recreation opportunities. This was all, so the organization thought, in the interest of the family farm. The huge transformation in American agriculture and rural life that had occurred in the past ten years had enormous consequences; what were once called farming communities practically no longer existed. It was up to the farmer and all levels of government, including the federal government, to guide and ease these transitions in rural American life.⁶⁹

In addition to the support for rural America, the agenda would support urban America's needs, so argued the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NREC). Through long-term agreements, new recreation spaces could be created to the benefit of urban people and farmers. The provisions of Title I of the legislation would "help meet the growing needs of both rural and urban people" for recreational facilities and would increase income opportunities for rural people. In light of surging demand for recreational facilities, it made sense to the NREC that the Department of Agriculture encourage local watershed organizations to make some reservoirs available for public

⁶⁹ Ibid, 517.

recreation. The NREC liked to think that the development of rural America had "at least as high a priority as the moon."⁷⁰

New "Crops" for the Family Farm: The Farm Recreation Programs

As a result of the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act, recreation now became a new government-supported business for family farms, taking its place alongside subsidies for wheat, corn, cotton and tobacco. It was a "new family-farm business" for a new time in American history, or so the Department hoped. The development of rural recreation facilities on private land "is now firmly established as part of the Department of Agriculture's program to increase farm income and promote orderly land use adjustment in response to new forces in rural America," wrote Secretary Freeman in the introduction to the final report of the Task Force on Income Producing Recreation Enterprises on Farm Land.⁷¹ Recreation enterprises could help rural people reach the important goals of prosperous family farms, new jobs and improved use and conservation of natural resources. Ultimately, recreational enterprises could be as much a part of rural area development as new factories and new homes.⁷²

The 1962 Act also signified a new commitment on the part of the Department of Agriculture to guide both rural *and* urban America and to adapt to the changing times. The American landscape and people were shifting, creating new problems and opportunities. The USDA saw itself as on the front lines of solving these interconnected

⁷⁰ Ibid, 965-6.

⁷¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Rural Recreation: A new family-farm business* (Washington DC: GPO, September 1962), v.

⁷² Ibid, v, 33.

problems; it had a "real interest in the rural-urban fringes of our cities," Freeman declared. The USDA sought to facilitate rural-urban cooperation, hoping urban governments and organizations would work with their rural counterparts to find ways to solve the mutual problems in the use of land, water and space. Orderly and "discriminating use of land," Freeman continued, "can help prevent growth of suburban slums and rural blight, preserve open space, and develop added recreation opportunities near concentrations of population."⁷³

Since the recreation agenda was new territory for the Department of Agriculture, it needed to provide research, support, suggestions and advice. "Since the idea of farmers engaging in recreation enterprises as a source of income is relatively new," wrote the final report, "a good deal of educational work directed toward people in rural areas is needed."⁷⁴ The various kinds of assistance included educational, promotional and information media resources, technical help, such as surveys, the development of recreation and financial plans, design and construction assistance, cost-sharing and credit. Farmers Home Administration loans, for example, could be used for repair or construction of buildings, the purchase of equipment and other needs. The Department also advised on what factors interested landowners needed to consider. One factor was attitude: individual farmers and the community overall needed to be positive. If the recreation enterprise were to succeed, the farmer needed to enjoy working with the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 26.

public. Any old attitudes of "discouraging" the city visitor needed to adjust to welcoming that very visitor into the farm home and to rural America.⁷⁵

In addition to a good attitude, the type and beauty of the farm mattered in determining the kinds of possible recreational activities and their success. Generally, farms with varied topography and land cover, including water and shade trees, were better than more uniform landscapes.⁷⁶ In addition, if farmers hoped to attract others to their vacation farm or ranch, or picnic area or campground, and have those people return, that farmer needed to preserve the natural beauty and character of the rural landscape. Serving facilities ought to blend into the background and clients should be "spared from the distractions of undesirable noises, flashing lights, and gaudy billboards."⁷⁷

In this observation of the importance of a diverse and beautiful farmscape for recreation purposes, the Department acknowledged that the family farms with recreation enterprises would differ from those successfully benefiting from the commodity programs, which encouraged more uniform, or "monocrop" landscapes focused on ultimate production. The Department promoted two different kinds of farmscapes simultaneously to meet the demands and needs of the time; in fact the farm recreation landscape was designed as a conservation measure in part to solve the problems of commercial agriculture. These farmscapes did not always work together, however, in the realities of the marketplace. The Department understood, though, that people most likely

⁷⁵ Ibid, 21.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 6.

would not want to visit thousands of acres of wheat or corn, or a hog farm, for a relaxing weekend getaway.⁷⁸

Regional location mattered in the development of recreation farming, particularly the farm's proximity to population centers, transportation infrastructure, utilities and other recreation resources, such as a public facility. In addition to diversified activities and landscapes, a good highway and nearby town where a person could purchase necessities and medical care were key.⁷⁹ A vacation farm, for example, would be most successful within a day's drive of a large city and in a comfortable climate for playing and working outdoors. Small farmers, ranchers and woodland owners would have exceptionally good opportunities to provide recreational facilities in certain regions with high population and an absence of publicly owned recreation acreage. The Northeast, for example, boasted one-quarter of the nation's population, but only 4 percent of its publicly owned acreage in the lower 48 states, and the South and North Central regions had similar statistics.

The Department counseled to future recreation farmers that to make the most attractive vacation farm, the scene would need to be both quiet and active. A quiet place was more important than spectacular scenery, though great scenery and historic sites

⁷⁸ The "factory farms" and feedlots that began to appear in this period were often not within weekend getaway distance; neither were they pictures of the ideal pastoral farm that would serve outdoor recreation purposes. The "factory farms" were "hidden" from view of the majority of the population—a theme of modern agriculture that scholars have addressed, from William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991) to Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

⁷⁹ *Rural Recreation: A new family farm business*, 12.

would help attract customers.⁸⁰ This recommendation built on the ORRRC's conclusion that the "quiet activities that take people into the wide reaches of rural America are the most popular forms of outdoor recreation." The farm family would need to provide indoor entertainment, such as reading material and good light, card tables and cards, radio, TV and games in the event of bad weather and for those "interested mainly in quiet relaxation." Picnic tables; fireplaces; a pond for swimming, boating and fishing; horses; access roads and trails for walking and riding; and outdoor games were all desirable. Good home-cooked food was also a must, so if no one in the family proved to be a "superior cook," the booklet advised hiring one. Water supply and sanitary conditions needed to meet standards of the state, locality and the guests, and the farmer also needed good liability insurance. Finally, the farmer and his or her family needed to want to talk to others, plan activities and guide guests' participation in farm or ranch activities, such as milking, feeding, caring for animals, haying, fruit picking and arts and crafts.⁸¹

The process of developing rural recreation land-use would also involve a cultural shift by transforming amenities into commodities. "Selling recreation may seem a strange business to rural people brought up in the tradition of hard work and open-handed hospitality," the Department recognized. What urban dwellers would pay for in the countryside—fishing, hunting, exploring a trail—farmers and ranchers had long provided

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1963), 3, 5. The pamphlet discussed the ORRRC's conclusions, assumptions and expectations surrounding outdoor recreation. In six activities, the rate of participation was expected to increase more than fourfold by the year 2000. They were hiking, water skiing, camping, sightseeing, boating and swimming. Expenditures for outdoor recreation trips, including vacations, were expected to increase from \$9.8 billion in 1960 to \$20.1 billion in 1976 and to \$45.7 billion in 2000. The market for recreation services was growing rapidly to meet the demand for outdoor recreation, which was expected to double by 1976. The Commission concluded this trend was the result of four factors, all expected to increase: population, disposable income, leisure time, and auto travel.

⁸¹ *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, 13.

to neighbors and guests for free. It could be strange to start selling such a privilege, even though country rural property owners had been selling recreation for decades all over the nation—in the resorts of New England, fishing camps of the Great Lakes, dude ranches of the Rockies and along the nation's oceans and lakes. Even so, with that in mind, the sale of recreation services did not need to interfere with granting these same privileges as special favors to immediate friends and guests. Having a business, in other words, did not require giving up those traditions.⁸²

In terms of direct advertising, or “selling” the farm, farmers needed to look for the best medium through which to advertise, whether trade journals, radio, newspapers or direct mail. If using radio, television or newspaper, it was better to spend money on a series of five or six installments at three or four day intervals, rather than for one large ad.⁸³ Suggested advertising techniques included making an ad stating, “Take Your Family to a Real American Farm for Seven Invigorating Days” as opposed to the more boring “Jones Farm—Vacation Families Accepted by the Week.” In “So You’re Planning a Vacation Farm Business!” the Extension Service advised that farmers advertise in local newspapers and tourist agencies and advocated that farm owners capitalize on the “newness of the farm vacation idea.” Ample and clear signs directing customers to the

⁸² *Rural Recreation: A new family-farm business*, 26, 33. The booklet addressed the legal and regulatory implications of the private-lands recreation movement, being a new development for many farmers. Because outdoor recreation activities often involved physical activity and sometimes firearms, animals, boats, water and rugged terrain, the landowner needed to anticipate injury and property damage and to prepare for liability by seeking legal support and insurance coverage, so the Department recommended. Rural recreation was a land use, like “growing cultivated crops or grazing livestock” and its long-term success required the same careful planning that farmers and ranchers had found necessary in using land for these more usual agricultural purposes. Farmers needed a plan for the land, a financial plan, and legal support.

⁸³ *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit*, 35.

farm were also a must.⁸⁴ Landowners needed to acquaint themselves with nearby community resources, such as fairs, historic sites, theaters, square dancing, and “legends and lore of the land,” thus promoting particular American symbols and rural heritage.⁸⁵

Finally, the Department recognized that rural and farm recreation was already a thriving business and provided numerous examples of farmers and ranchers who had begun diverse, successful recreation enterprises on their lands across the United States. In the East, a farm couple operating a large dairy and potato farm supplemented their income by taking in summer boarders. Another farm family, previously fully engaged in dairy farming, now also sold Christmas trees and maple tree products, and made haymaking and tending cattle a diversion for kids. Another farmer converted a field next to his pond into a campsite, and a potato, grain and tomato farmer converted part of his 208-acre farm into a 9-hole golf course and planned to expand it to 18 holes. In the Midwest, a farm was converted into a “frontier park” complete with an Indian village, an ox team, farm animals grouped together, and antique farm equipment. The owner laid out scenic routes for stagecoach rides through the woodland.⁸⁶ Every region of the United States, every climate and landscape boasted some kind of developing recreational enterprise that mixed with or supplanted more traditional agricultural uses of the land.

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⁸⁴ Federal Extension Service, *So You're Planning a Vacation Farm Business!* (Washington, DC: GPO, n.d.).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Rural Recreation: A new family-farm business*, Appendix 1, 34-56. The Report cited many examples of current farm recreation projects. In the main body of the Report it gave in depth information on the seven categories of outdoor recreation and in the Appendix listed many examples regionally.

Secretary Freeman expressed high hopes for the agenda in farmland recreation as the program got off the ground in 1963, and not only rural, but urban America was at the front of his mind. "I share your conviction that recreation holds great promise," Freeman wrote to Don McBride, special assistant to Senator Mike Monroney (D-OK) regarding an address McBride had made on water resource use. "The needs of urban America are clear. If we can help shape more rapidly the more economic use of the resources of rural America to meet these needs, rural America will profit, too. This is the whole thrust of our concentration on rural area development programs here in the Department."⁸⁷

McBride responded, observing that rural recreation "will become more and more necessary to the American way of life."⁸⁸ McBride's article, Freeman commented, tapped a "very vital area and one that increasingly is coming to the front as a part of a program to assist the forces which are rearranging the resources of rural America in a more economic pattern to the benefit of farm and city alike."⁸⁹

In a bold expression of where he thought farmland recreation would go, and the way it would reshape American life more broadly, Freeman wrote to Commerce Secretary Luther Hodges in 1964: "This field of recreation is indeed a challenging one. I predicted the other day that twenty years from now it will be the number one source of

⁸⁷ Freeman to Don McBride, 12 February 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1-Mar. 22."

⁸⁸ McBride to Freeman, 18 February 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1-Mar. 22."

⁸⁹ Freeman to Ed Edmondson, 12 February 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1-Mar. 22."

income for the farmer.”⁹⁰ He repeated the prediction in a *Washington Post* profile on the program: “Yes, You Can Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm and Keep the Farm Up, Too.” Solving the “farm problem is turning out to be fun,” the article began, launching into a description of how Frederick William McCormick turned his 80-acre poultry and livestock farm near Shartlesville, Pennsylvania into a recreation destination with horses, a farmhouse to rent and three spring-fed ponds stocked for fishing. In 1964, McCormick planned to expand his business through assistance from the federal farm recreation program. Economists estimated that with the continued growth of urban areas, city dwellers would seek more “wide open spaces” to the tune of 23 million acres within two decades, not counting public lands, “which are often too far away for an afternoon in the country or an overnight camping trip.” Farm recreation could become so profitable that within 20 years it will be the “number one dollar earner of any single farm commodity,” said Freeman in the article.⁹¹

By 1964 Freeman admitted he was feeling more confident about the program than he had in 1962. “It has taken us more than 2 years now to get this program rolling,” he wrote Nick Kotz, a journalist for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, “but I feel more certain now than when I first put out feelers on it early in 1962 prior to submitting the program to

⁹⁰ Freeman to Luther Hodges, 12 May 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4100, Folder, “Committees, Recreation Advisory Council, Jan. 1-July 21, 1964.”

⁹¹ Christina Demaitre, “Yes, You Can Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm and Keep the Farm Up, Too,” *The Washington Post*, June 14, 1964. In a memo to Willard Cochrane and other staff on commodity programs, Freeman reiterated his future vision, urging them to keep in mind that “an integral part of the total program, of course, is the basic resource adjustment and you will recall we have recently been giving special emphasis to the recreation area. I am increasingly convinced some exciting things are taking place here and have even gone so far as to make the prediction that in twenty years recreation would be the number one farm crop in the country. This potential I hope you will also take into consideration along with the trade and aid part of our over-all program” (Freeman to Willard Cochrane, John Schnitther, and Kate Keffskey, 5 June 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, Folder, “Recreation Program, Apr. 18 to Oct. 1 (2 of 2)”).

Congress that it points the way to better things for all concerned.”⁹² In the fall of 1963, the USDA performed its first “Tour of Income-Producing Recreational Enterprises.” Department of Agriculture official, Phil Weaver, visited 26 income-producing recreation enterprises administered through the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration and the Soil Conservation Service Watershed Projects in eight states: South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Arkansas and Texas. He met with farmers and key community leaders, visiting every farmer engaged in the “new venture” except one. The range of recreation enterprises visited included hunting preserves, fishing, boating, swimming, picnicking, camping and cabin sites, golf, riding stables, commercial fish farming, tennis, baseball, vacation farms and water skiing. Weaver found that farmers were generally optimistic and enthusiastic about the new venture, and were “impressed that the Secretary’s Office was giving such a high priority to this activity.”⁹³

He also found some confusion in the field about the new program, particularly in areas of low-income and greatest need. For example, a “long waiting list for rural housing loans exists in all areas because of lack of funds. There is misunderstanding and apprehension when people are informed that no funds are available for rural housing loans and yet an individual or association can obtain funds for constructing a golf course.” He further observed that the inconsistency between the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service program, which provided cost-share assistance for

⁹² Freeman to Nick Kotz, Staff Correspondent, *The Minneapolis Tribune*, 18 September 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, Folder “Recreation Program, Apr. 18 to Oct. 1 (1 of 2)”.

⁹³ “Tour of Income-Producing Recreational Enterprises,” Memo from Phil Weaver to the Secretary, 23 October 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, “Recreation Program, June 26-Oct 28.”

converting cropland to grass, trees, wildlife habitat and income-producing recreation facilities and the Farmers Home Administration programs which loaned money for recreation enterprises, but which required the farmers' primary income to be from farming, was confusing. Weaver recommended that the terms and requirements of the FHA loans be adjusted to gain the best results. Income from recreational enterprises on farms needed to be considered farm income, thus allowing a farmer to engage fully in a recreation business. "A farmer will not take the maximum amount of cropland out of production to devote to recreational purposes" as long as the restriction that he derive the majority of his income from "farming" exists, Weaver observed. Weaver's call for an adjustment to the FHA loan program's requirements would be taken up by others as the program evolved.⁹⁴

In November, after another tour of farm recreation enterprises in Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota, Weaver recommended that members of Congress visit some of the projects in various states to see the program in action and highlighted the connection of the farm recreation programs to urban dwellers.⁹⁵ Such a tour would "give them a first-hand impression of the grassroots interest and enthusiasm which exist at the local level," he anticipated. "The greatest asset we have in this understanding," Weaver believed, "is the dedicated and capable force or agency people in the field. We must expose Congress to them. Members in urban areas

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Memo from Phil Weaver to the Secretary, 19 November 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct 29-Dec 31."

have a keen stake in many such rural enterprises which adjoin crowded cities and provide a recreational outlet for their constituents."⁹⁶

Weaver's trip to Morgan County, Tennessee, for example, featured the state's first approved recreation loan to a 54 year old farmer named Roy West.⁹⁷ West had been losing money from farming—a common feature for those taking advantage of the federal program—and wanted to pursue the creation of recreational areas, including fishing, boating, swimming, pony and horseback riding and a general picnic area. He had received a total loan for \$17,250 over 40 years and eventually wanted to add a tennis court, volleyball and shuffleboard. The local Farmers Home Administration agent commented that the lay of West's 75 acres was ideally suited for a lake area, picnic grounds and riding trails, with a lot of natural scenic beauty based around creeks and mountains.⁹⁸

A few states away from the West property sat the George C. McClure pilot recreation project in Lawrence County, Ohio. According to the *Ironton Tribune*, when Weaver visited on October 28, 1963, the McClure family was busy bulldozing earth to create a dam across a narrow valley.⁹⁹ The McClure project presented an ideal kind of situation for the program, as approximately 250,000 people lived within a 50-mile radius of the farm. McClure owned 749 acres dominated by hilly woods and meadows, with 79 acres of cropland and 40 acres of fertile creek bottoms. A small creek ran through the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "US Department of Agriculture Official Visits," *Morgan County News*, 10 October 1963.

⁹⁸ Memorandum on the Roy West Recreation Loan, Henry Wattenbarger, FHA agent in Wartburg, Tennessee to Phillip S. Brown, Director of Information, FHA, Washington, DC, 8 April 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 29- Dec. 31."

⁹⁹ "Consultant Views Pilot Project Here," *The Ironton Tribune*, 3 November 1963.

aesthetically pleasing valley fields. The Wayne National Forest was located nearby, increasing the area available for horseback trail riding.¹⁰⁰ The family, including McClure, his wife and five children, lived in a nine-room house, owned a seven-box stall horse barn and general purpose flat barn and silo. As with many farmers, McClure worked outside the farm in a steel mill for additional income and his sons did most of the farming. The family raised dairy and beef cattle and cropped hay, corn, small grains, and burley tobacco as the principal crops. They also owned 29 saddle horses and were active in the 4-H, horseback riding circles and the Lawrence County Farm Vacation Association. The McClures hosted 18 farm guests in 1962, and increased to 50 in 1963, with the availability of saddle horses contributing greatly to attracting farm vacation guests.¹⁰¹

Even with these diverse incomes, the family needed more income support, and with the help from a county extension agent, decided that a substantial expansion of its recreation enterprise was the best alternative. The McClures anticipated that additional income would be obtained primarily through an expansion of their farm vacation program and planned the following recreation development: a 5-acre lake created in narrow upland valley for fishing, swimming and boating; building five cabins for farm vacation guests; and a five-acre playground. They also planned to develop a road leading to the area and additional horseback riding trails. They expected sale or lease of 30 cabin sites on the wooded slopes near the lake to help offset substantial investments. Through the

¹⁰⁰ Memo to Phillip Weaver from J.E. Bradfute, Executive Director of the Ohio Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation State Committee, "Report on George C. McClure Pilot Recreation Project" 14 November 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct 29-Dec 31."

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

new Cropland Conversion Program, McClure agreed to convert 23.4 cropland acres for 10 years to an income-producing recreation enterprise. In return, he received a \$985 cropland adjustment payment and about \$3,265 toward the \$10,000 lake cost. Under the agreement, the 23.4 acres could be grazed but not cropped for the 10 years. In these ways, the USDA farm recreation program helped to develop the vacation farm on the McClure property, which the McClures advertised as: "All Year Vacation at the Palomino Ranch," including horseback riding, folk dancing, and hayrides.

Other reports and press accounts further tracked how the program was unfolding. *The Republican Journal* of Belfast, Maine observed: "A golf course shaping up in Brooks is an innovation of interesting potential for a considerable surrounding area. There are those in the vicinity who probably are more used to agricultural pursuits but may welcome a new kind of activity in more or less accustomed surroundings." The *Journal* imagined certain kinds of changes in the landscape that would accompany the land's new uses: "Certain fields doubtless will be tailored a bit from previously, greens added, while plenty of woods will remain around to encourage skill in keeping the ball from flights high, wide and far out of bounds." The article contemplated an example of a successful conversion of a farm to a golf course in Iowa. "There are obvious limitations to the number of farms that can be converted so successfully to golf courses as that one in Iowa," it admitted. "A question may arise whether the Brooks project will serve golfing farmers or farming golfers." Either way, the *Journal* concluded, "something now is being added that looks like a permanent feature attraction in the county." Indeed, many accounts considered the new program to be a permanent and even dominant feature of the

American landscape in years to come. "There is really no accurate means of measuring the potential of this project, as regards economic benefits to the county," wrote *The Times Dispatch* out of Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, "but one day they should be considerable."¹⁰² *The Sacramento Bee* declared, "Future Land Use Must Include Recreation."¹⁰³

Across the nation more of these "country clubs" were springing up. A "new harvest for farmers" was upon the landscape, declared the *New York Times* in September 1963. Something different was "going on down on the farm, and it has nothing to do with milking the cows, planting the corn or pruning the orchard." With a boost from the government and under the stress of overproduction, many farmers were finding it "more profitable to cater to the city slicker's need for leisure-time recreation than to his stomach." On what were once grassy meadowlands, all alive with cows, clubhouses replaced barns, and silos overlooked fairways. Lakes used for watering cattle now watered people. Stephen Little from Penobscot County, Maine, switched from "cows to golfers" after his milk wholesaler informed him he would no longer buy his milk and opened the Pine Hill Golf Club in 1962.¹⁰⁴

The *Des Moines Register* profiled the Haberman family's literal transformation of agricultural space into recreational space near Walker, Iowa. The family had converted 53 acres of a 190-acre farm into a recreation area as one of eight recreation projects approved in Iowa in 1964 totaling \$52,300 in loans for all eight. Former stalls had become showers, as the article's title indicated: "Their Barn has Shower Stalls and a

¹⁰² "Frankly Speaking," *The Times Dispatch*, Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, October 17, 1963.

¹⁰³ "Future Land Use Must Include Recreation," *The Sacramento Bee*, June 21, 1964.

¹⁰⁴ "New Harvest for Farmers," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1963.

Snack Bar Now.”¹⁰⁵ Where once crops and hay grew, “clear water from a nine-acre pond slaps gently at a sandy beach on the Frank Haberman farm.” At the article’s publication, Haberman had received \$3,172 for diverting 58 acres from crop production for one year and \$2,587 in federal funds for building an earth dam that created the nine-acre farm pond stocked with 2000 bass—bluegills, crappies and catfish to be added later. Before the site had officially opened, as many as 300 people had visited to recreate and escape summer heat. Haberman had not been a lifelong farmer the article was quick to point out; rather he “makes his living selling business machine form cards used primarily in electric computers” and he and his family had lived on the farm for four years. In Henrietta, Texas, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Marlatt used a loan to finance the construction of a small lake on their property for fishing, boating as well as a nearby picnic area with tables. Five acres formerly in pasture and grazing were converted to these recreational uses.¹⁰⁶

In Yantic, Connecticut, population 1000, the Farmers Home Administration authorized a loan for \$59,250 to an association of farmers and rural citizens to build a Little League ballpark. Fifty three members in the corporation anticipated serving about 400 Little Leaguers.¹⁰⁷ The community group planned to purchase 8.5 acres of cropland that had been in corn the previous year for \$15,000 to build the park. In the summer of 1963, 288 citizens of Denton, Maryland received \$151,000 from a Farmers Home

¹⁰⁵ “Their Barn has Shower Stalls and a Snack Bar Now,” *Des Moines Register*, July 12, 1964.

¹⁰⁶ “Recreational Loan of \$300 to 12th District Live Stock Farmer Expected to Supplement His Annual Farm Income by \$1000,” 1964. NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, “XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Program loans 1961.”

¹⁰⁷ “Recreation Loans made by Farmers Home Administration,” from Robert S. Crites, Recreation Specialist, Farmers Home Administration to Rodney E. Leonard, Assistant to the Secretary, 18 February 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, Folder, “Recreation Program, Jan. 1 to Apr. 17.”

Administration loan and raised \$43,000 to build a clubhouse, swimming pool, golf course and tennis courts.¹⁰⁸ In November 1963, the Soil Conservation assisted in the recreational development of the Donald Meyer farm in Lincoln County, Missouri under the Cropland Conversion Program. After doing a soil survey, and with the help of an SCS technician, Meyer planned to develop a 15-acre lake, supplemented by two smaller ponds also converted from cropland. Some land formerly cropped would be seeded to grass, and a parking area and shelter house were also to be constructed on the property.¹⁰⁹

In Cortland County, New York, the 300-member Cortland County Recreation Association received a \$253,000 insured loan to make a recreational facility available to 112,000 rural people. One hundred and thirty acres of farmland that had been used to produce dairy cattle feed had been cleared and the recreational center's pool and tennis courts built on those acres were expected to be completed by early July 1965. The loan would also finance an 18-hole golf course, playground, softball field, a miniature golf course and two ponds.¹¹⁰ An insured loan to the Stoddard family of Bowdoin, Maine, helped to supplement their income from 40 head of Swiss Brown cattle through recreational development. A \$5000 loan financed fishing, swimming, camping, tenting

¹⁰⁸ "Yes, You Can Keep 'Em Down on the Farm."

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum to Phil Weaver, USDA from Gail Bagley, Work Unit Conservationist, Soil Conservation Service, on "Cropland Conversion Program 1963—Role of the Soil Conservation Service in Development of Donald Meyer Farm, Lincoln County, Missouri, for recreation," 18 November 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 29-Dec 31."

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 8. The memorandum also described where the Rural Renewal program funds were going and how they were being used. A total of \$669,520 in Farmers Home Administration loans and technical assistance were made under the new program in fiscal 1964 to Florida and Arkansas. The majority of the loan total (\$553,000) was loaned to the Little River County Rural Development authority in Arkansas and a \$116,500 loan was made to the Holmes County, Florida Development Commission. In Arkansas, a \$105,000 loan went to purchase and develop a 40-acre homesite tract near Foreman, Arkansas designed to provide housing to low-income rural residents. A \$95,000 loan went to purchase 614 acres of land for the development of a demonstration forest and possible later development of a recreational area. Three other loans went to purchase tracts of land to build housing for low-income residents.

and picnicking facilities on their 20-acre dairy farm. The Stoddards, who had been farming for 20 years, also participated in the pilot Cropland Conversion Program and opened their recreation area on July 4, 1964.¹¹¹

These developments all contributed to the national goal of creating more outdoor recreation space for Americans, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) reported in December 1963. The ORRRC reports had confirmed that shifting private land use toward outdoor recreation was an important national initiative, confirming what the Department of Agriculture had come to believe as well. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's creation in the Interior Department "gave impetus to Federal efforts on public land," while new authorities in the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962 had "enabled the Department of Agriculture to enlarge its activity to increase recreation facilities on the much larger area of private land in the country."¹¹² Both these new fronts on public and private lands contributed to the national demand for additional outdoor recreation spaces.

While the sums of money were small, farmers provided the labor, and recreation projects were widespread. In addition, acreage needed for recreation enterprises was typically smaller than acreage needed for traditional agricultural production. In some

¹¹¹ Ibid, 7.

¹¹² "Outdoor Recreation and Land Conversion," Soil Conservation Service, 16 December 1963, p. 1-2, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 29-Dec. 31." The Department of Agriculture "has moved on many fronts during the past year to help private land owners meet the expanding demand for outdoor recreation by providing facilities that bring new income while shifting land away from the production of surplus crops. The Department has long felt that expanded outdoor recreation opportunities were badly needed across the Nation. People searching for fund [sic] have been jamming our parks, camping grounds, lakes, beaches, and highways. Publicly provided recreation facilities have not kept up with this booming demand. The Report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission in 1962 confirmed our conviction, and we moved to stimulate private landowners to convert cropland to recreation."

cases, depending on the recreation enterprise, one acre on a farm (or less) could be all that was needed for a successful recreation endeavor. Within the past year and a half of the new USDA program's existence (from September 1962 to December 1963), 17,500 soil conservation districts had established one or more income-producing recreation enterprises, another 17,500 had consulted with SCS technicians about such plans and 2,500 operators had adopted recreation as a primary source of income on 750,000 acres of land across the nation. To that date, the Farmers Home Administration loan program had assisted 130 farm operators and 26 nonprofit associations in 41 states for a total of \$3.33 million in loans for recreational development.¹¹³ Under the 1963 Cropland Conversion Program, county ASCS farm committees with technical assistance from the SCS and the U.S. Forest Service, entered into 10-year agreements with farmers in 35 states to shift 8500 acres of cropland to outdoor recreation use on 120 farms.¹¹⁴

Further, the response for cost-sharing for recreation development in small watersheds had been "tremendous." The SCS, which directly administered the watershed program, received proposals for including recreation as a cost-sharing feature in 53 projects in 26 states. The total estimated costs of development for that program came to about \$24 million, divided equally between federal and local funds. An additional 50 projects included fish and wildlife development. Recreation was just one of many new uses for land producing crops in overabundance. Farmers in more than 2,900 locally

¹¹³ \$3.3 million in 1963 is equal to \$23.27 million in 2010.

¹¹⁴ "Outdoor Recreation and Land Conversion," 2.

administered soil and water conservation districts were converting 2.5 million acres of cropland to less intensive uses annually, including livestock and timber.¹¹⁵

Other Department publications tracked how both community organizations and individuals were utilizing the program's assistance. "Nearly 9 Million Enjoy Outdoor Recreation on Leased Private Lands" declared a February 1964 press release.¹¹⁶

According to a recent nationwide survey performed by the Soil Conservation Service, more than 51,800 organized groups with 8.9 million members either leased or had permits to use 39 million acres of privately owned land for outdoor recreation. The using groups included sportsmen, youth and church groups, employee associations, ski clubs, and general recreation associations. To Freeman, the survey offered "ample evidence that emphasis on the use of private lands for outdoor recreation developments to solve one of the growing needs of our society is a step in the right direction." The survey also revealed that group use of water and land resources for outdoor recreation were uniform across the nation.

In the fall of 1964, the USDA reported that the nation's family farmers would realize \$300,000 in additional income from recreational enterprises financed last fiscal year through Farmers Home Administration.¹¹⁷ During the fiscal year 1964, the Farmers Home Administration received 907 applications for recreation loans. Total loans advanced came to \$7,752,000 to both individual farmers and groups of rural residents in

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹¹⁶ "Nearly 9 Million Enjoy Outdoor Recreation on Leased Private Lands," USDA press release, 12 February 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, Folder, "Recreation Program, Jan 1 to Apr. 17."

¹¹⁷ "Recreation Enterprises Increased Farm Income, USDA reports" USDA press release, 15 September 1964 (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4).

26 states to finance farm and community recreation enterprises.¹¹⁸ One hundred sixty individual family farmers had received \$1,252,000 to carry out recreation development while the rest, \$6,500,000 in loans, went to 63 nonprofit associations formed by farmers and rural residents to finance large-scale community recreation projects. The USDA anticipated that the average farmer would increase his or her income by approximately \$2000. Most of the farmers who received an FHA loan to finance recreation enterprises also received credit for farm operating expenses, refinancing debts and farm enlargement.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ \$7.75 million in 1964 is equal to \$54.2 million in 2010.

¹¹⁹ The FHA compiled the number of different types of recreational enterprises financed by farm ownership and operating loans from the inception of the program through November 1964 as the following:

Type of recreational enterprise	Number
1. vacation farms	26
2. cabins and cottages	42
3. Picnicking, sports and camping areas	96
4. Swimming facilities	20
5. Golf courses	14
6. Winter sports	3
7. Horseback riding	55
8. Fishing for recreation	114
9. Boating facilities	30
10. Travel trailer parks	24
11. Hunting preserves	29
12. Other:	
Pack service for big game hunting	8
Youth camp	6
Duck blind	1
Trap shooting	1
Nature trail	1
Archery	1
Bait farm	1
Quarter horse race track	1
Stock car track	1
Miniature Golf	1
Golf driving range	1

Soil and Water Association Loans for Recreation (SCS)	
Golf	72
Swimming, tennis, clubhouse, playground	26
Marina, snackbar, trailer and camping area,	
Parking	9

All of these conservation developments, the Department made certain to point out, worked toward the larger goals of strengthening and revitalizing America's rural communities, balancing the agricultural industry and meeting urban America's needs. Residents of 438 small towns, open country areas and nearby cities in 47 states and Puerto Rico either already were or would be enjoying new and better outdoor recreational facilities because of Farmers Home Administration credit program, boasted one report.¹²⁰ "The basic thought behind our recreational loan program," Secretary Freeman reiterated in a press release, "is that this is the way to bring additional income to the farm family, to stabilize the rural community and to make use of land not needed for crop production."

"Rediscovering" and Conserving the Nation's Agrarian Ideal and Heritage

Implicit and explicit in the farm recreation agenda were assumptions about what the ideal family farm looked like and what kind of farm would satisfy the desires of urban and suburban people—the kind of farm, in other words, that the majority of Americans would see. As mentioned earlier, diverse landscapes with trees, ponds and fields near urban centers were ideal farms for the program, and the kinds of farms the Department hoped to sustain. These farms were not, most likely, the small percentage of large, commercial farms that benefited most from the majority and most expensive of the

Ball field	7
Fairgrounds	1
Skiing	4
Fishing and hunting resevoir, picnicking, And boating	12
Rodeo	1

(NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, John A Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-2).

¹²⁰ "How USDA's Farmers Home Administration is Strengthening America's Family Farms and Rural Communities: Facts and Figures," December 31, 1964, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII, Box 1.4/109, Folder, "XIIIB2c Rural Devel. Program loans 1961."

USDA's farm programs and which produced the vast majority of U.S. food and fiber. In shaping this mixed agricultural landscape, and in attempting to develop an alternative yet complementary agricultural landscape to the large-scale farms, the USDA faced many challenges.

The Wall Street Journal doubted that the recreation program would do much to curb surplus, one of its declared goals, because many productive acres were far from centers of population and simply were not beautiful. The "possibilities for diverting surplus-producing cropland to recreational use are obviously limited," it wrote. "Great slices of the nation's most productive acreage are flat and treeless, ill-suited for playland use."¹²¹ On the other end of the spectrum, truly poor farms would not work either. Even though one of the program's aims was to support small, often suffering family farms with the goal of eradicating rural poverty and increasing farm income, at the end of the day, the financial, organizational and legal requirements of putting together a recreation business made the program unattainable for the most rural poor. Inviting urban visitors either to an industrial farm in the middle of the rural Great Plains or a denuded, unyielding poverty-stricken farm would not likely satisfy the recreation desires of customers looking for a pastoral, idealized rural getaway.

By the 1960s, the USDA was struggling to deal with the negative consequences of its own successes; its attempts to make agriculture more and more efficient had resulted in the overproduction of agricultural goods, wreaked havoc on the agricultural economy and threatened the very family farm system the department purported to support. The

¹²¹ "Farmers Urged to Aid In Shifting cropland to Recreational Use," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 1962.

fact that price supports did not help the majority of farmers had spurred the creation of the Rural Development Program under Eisenhower and a combination of factors had spurred the creation of the Kennedy administration's land-use adjustment agenda. Still, awareness did not fix the reality that USDA programs worked to achieve conflicting goals simultaneously: high prices for farmers, low costs for consumers, technological efficiency, the conservation of the small to medium-sized family farm, eradication of rural poverty and beautiful agrarian spaces for suburban and urban America. The *Washington Post* wrote approvingly about the 1963 *Yearbook of Agriculture's* recognition of the reality of the decline of the number of farms in the nation and changes in rural America. But, it wrote cynically, the "family farm hearing is an annual ritual on Capitol Hill. Agriculture Department witnesses dutifully appear to reassure the Senate or House Agriculture committees that the family farm is indeed thriving."¹²²

Through the farm recreation program, public policy for the first time attempted to solve problems in the agricultural economy, rural life and urban life by targeting the effort to make farms themselves part of what historian Lizabeth Cohen terms the "landscape of mass consumption" after World War II—a way to facilitate the direct consumption of the rural and agrarian experience. As it did so, the program also built on cultural transformations in American life in post World War II America. As more and more Americans moved away from rural America, or left farming to move to cities and suburbs, the agrarian experience became packaged in other ways and through other means. It was by no means lost, but rather transformed, even idealized, as it was not

¹²² "Whispering about Decline of Family Farm Now a Shout," *The Washington Post*, November 3, 1963. "So embedded is the family farm in the fact and fancy of the American story," it wrote, "that no politician would dare to suggest that the family farm may indeed not be the best of all possible rural worlds."

experienced in the way that more than half of Americans did until the 1930s—through actual farming. Instead, Americans could go to a grocery store and see a red barn on a food label, or watch television programs that combined the suburban and rural ideals. The 1960s television programs “Petticoat Junction” and “Green Acres,” for example, were both set in rural America, and the latter on a farm owned by New York City residents who moved to the country. These programs and others connected Americans to some version of the rural experience in a time when more and more Americans were becoming distanced from actual agriculture and experiencing rural life through tourism, popular culture and grocery stores.¹²³

President Kennedy had touched on many of these themes and the importance of guiding and establishing new critical connections between rural and urban America in his declaration of Farm-City week in November 1963. “National Farm-City Week” was created in 1955 to celebrate and recognize important connections between city and farm country and each year the president of the United States designated the week before Thanksgiving for the observance.¹²⁴ The observance was necessary to focus attention on

¹²³ *Rural Recreation: A new family farm business* highlighted two pertinent facts about the vacation farm option of farm recreation: 1) “The confinements of city life lead to a mass desire for ‘escape’, to get out into the great open spaces,” and 2) “farming is a vague mystery to most Americans—the city dwellers—and a mystery that has great curiosity and fascination” (3).

¹²⁴ The creation of this observance in 1955 demonstrates the federal impetus for recognition of changing relationships between rural and urban America, and the desire to facilitate meaningful connections between the two in the post World War II era. “National Farm-City Week” observances continue to this day. On November 19, 2010, President Barack Obama proclaimed the week of November 19-25 “National Farm-City Week.” His proclamation addressed many of the issues that this chapter addresses. Obama also recognized the current move toward local food and the role farmers played in connecting urban, suburban and rural areas: “Rising interest in local and regional food highlights farmers’ contributions in connecting urban, suburban, and rural areas. American children are learning about the origins of our food and healthy food options by visiting farms, learning from hard-working farmers and ranchers, and trying their hand at agriculture through networks of school gardens and farm to school programs. Thanks to their constant enterprise and innovation, rural communities are building new domestic and international markets for their high quality food, fuel, and fiber products. As our agricultural industries continue to feed individuals at

the realities that technological and scientific advancements had made superabundance possible, yet required fewer workers in agriculture and new economic opportunities in rural areas. Furthermore, "our increasingly urban society urgently needs open space and outdoor recreation" and the needs "of all citizens can be more fully met through new and multiple uses of land not required for crop production and through wise use of all our soil, water, and forest resources." Kennedy urged public meetings, discussions, exhibits, and press, radio and television features that emphasized the "interdependence of rural and urban families and the opportunities accruing to all citizens through economic development of rural areas, including new and expanded outdoor recreation enterprises on farms, in small watersheds, and on privately owned forest land." He further urged that "whenever possible, urban and rural people exchange visits so that each will better understand the other," an exchange that farm recreation could facilitate through direct experience.¹²⁵

The federal farm recreation program explicitly stated its goal to connect Americans to the values of rural and agrarian life, building on long-standing ideals about the centrality and importance of the family farm and rural life in American society.

home and around the globe, we must help ensure robust and vibrant rural communities to support them." Obama also addressed the conservation of agricultural resources, the importance of protecting America's agricultural legacy and the need for Americans to reconnect to the outdoors: "For agriculture to thrive, we must remain committed to protecting our valuable natural resources and diverse ecosystems. In April, I launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative to develop a 21st century conservation agenda that will reconnect Americans with the outdoors and protect our Nation's vast and varied natural heritage. Senior officials throughout my Administration have travelled across the country to farms, State fairs, and community meetings to learn about innovative ways farmers, ranchers, tribes, conservationists, and concerned citizens are working together to preserve our rich agricultural legacy." ("Presidential Proclamation—National Farm-City Week," 19 November 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/19/presidential-proclamation-national-farm-city-week>). Outdoor recreation remains a key way that Americans experience the agricultural outdoors today, a push that, in terms of public policy initiatives, dates to the mid 1950s federal agricultural conservation agenda that is the subject of this study.

¹²⁵ John F. Kennedy, "Proclamation 3467—National Farm-City Week, 1963," 5 August 1963, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

America had an obligation to conserve and preserve its family farms because family farms conserved and preserved America. Americans were supposed to have fun on farms, but there was more to it; in visiting and spending money on farms, they were supporting the backbone of the nation for the public interest and conserving American identity.¹²⁶

Conservation in the form of farm recreation and consumption of the agrarian outdoors was a form of civic engagement and responsibility, in other words. For one, vacationing on a farm would promote good American values, particularly for children, by allowing them to learn about the sources of their food, conservation and stewardship of the land, good work habits and biological facts of life. Too many children grew up without direct contact with outdoor life—the elements, native plants, etc—and they needed “opportunities to learn of man’s relationship to his total environment, as did our pioneer forefathers,” wrote one USDA pamphlet.¹²⁷ Farm recreation would provide those essential opportunities.

The farm recreation agenda also promoted the idea that the American farm was a critical part of American outdoor heritage and nature that was worthy of conservation for its own aesthetic sake, just like other well-established targets of federal conservation and preservation policy: wilderness, mountains, rivers, forests and seashores. Some kinds of

¹²⁶ This concept dovetails nicely with the postwar concept of citizen-consumer. By “consuming” the agrarian experience and helping a real small farmer, the consumer was strengthening America on many fronts.

¹²⁷ *Rural Recreation: A new family farm business*, 4; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Rural Recreation: new opportunities on private land*, (Washington, DC: GPO, June 1963), 2, 17. “Children, especially, enjoy seeing farm animals and finding and examining the many kinds of lizards, frogs, crickets, butterflies, and other forms of animal life they find in the country. For those from the city each day brings a succession of marvelous ‘firsts’ as they explore the world around them.”

outdoor recreation on farms were directly about farming itself, while the farm merely provided the venue for other types, such as fishing, hunting and picnicking. The Department reflected and imbibed the strong emphasis on the importance of outdoor recreation for the health and balance of American society that developed in the two decades after World War II, in one case concluding that “outdoor life is a fundamental part of the American tradition.”¹²⁸ The “open green space” of the nation provided a “soul-regenerating refuge” to the “teeming millions in our cities” that could no longer be denied, Freeman declared in 1962.¹²⁹ In order for Americans to benefit most from their interactions with nature and the outdoors on farms, the landowner needed a good plan of land-management and conservation of its natural resources. Many farms could simultaneously furnish both a “wild-land experience” and a “domestic farm experience” for city folks.¹³⁰

The federal government was not alone in promoting these themes that were products of both longstanding American cultural heritage and the immediate post World War II context of suburban and urban expansion, entrenchment of large-scale agriculture and brewing concerns with preserving natural beauty on America’s lands and waterscapes. The private sector industry in rural and farm recreation, which the Department had acknowledged several times, built on the same cultural understandings, though with less of a civic engagement and public interest agenda. While generations of farmers had hosted friends and relatives by the “carload” for free, now paying stranger

¹²⁸ *Rural Recreation, a new family farm business*, 4.

¹²⁹ Freeman as quoted in William G. Weart, “Recreation Held Farm Commodity,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1962.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

wanted to join in, declared the 17th annual edition of Farm Vacations and Holiday Inc.'s *Vacation Guide*, in 1965. Why? "Because it's a casual, outdoor, inexpensive, meet-the-people kind of vacation. It's unhurried and relaxed, and there's no dressing up. It's a chance for the family to be together."

In addition, farm vacations presented a way for Americans to "rediscover their country." They promised a "new way to see America," the guide declared in a statement that would likely have made no sense twenty years earlier when more Americans had more familiarity with farms.¹³¹ But now the majority of Americans lived in metropolitan centers of some fashion. Farm vacations gave a break from the "long season in the rat-race of suburbia," wrote one vacationer. They were "an old-fashioned American custom which has had an amazing revival in the past few years," wrote another. "To most Americans, even those like us who have never lived on a farm, the farm is the home, a sort of national shrine which symbolizes the self-reliance and self-sufficiency that America stands for. Having visited a farm, we felt somehow better Americans, closer to our traditions." Besides, he added, "we had fun."¹³²

¹³¹ Farm Vacations and Holidays, Inc., *Vacation Guide to Recommended Farms, Ranches, Lodges, Campsites, and Trailer Parks in 50 States and Canada, 17th Annual Edition* (New York: Farm Vacations and Holidays, 1965).

¹³² *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1957, reprinted in *Vacation Guide to Recommended Farms*. The *Guide* offered various testimonials and articles from vacation-goers. Ed Wallace wrote of the appeal of American farms to city dwellers and foreigners: "Life on ranches and farms may have been dull in ages past, but it's swinging now. City dwellers are taking to the farm vacation idea like cockle burrs to a careless collie." And the "wonder and amusement of the American farm" was not limited to Americans, rather its "fame for warmth and hospitality, for lack of airs and ostentation is becoming worldwide." Indeed, vacation farms listed in the 1964 guide reported having guests from England, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Holland, France, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Spain, Tunisia, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Columbia, Argentina, Panama Canal Zone, Korea, Indonesia, Australia, Nepal, India and Madagascar ("Farm Life Lures Slickers," the *New York World Telegram & Sun*, reprinted in the *Guide*, 9-10).

As another wrote, farm vacations had special allure "in these days of urban sprawl." Americans were "rediscovering America—learning that ours is still a vast land of sweeping plains and soaring mountains, of unspoiled lakes, fields and forests." Not every farm was a "fun fest," the author admitted,

The Department of Agriculture, the *Vacation Guide* and others used similar language to describe the expanded uses and productivity of farms in the recreation realm: new kinds of cash "crops" for farms. People, golf and hospitality all became crops for farms. "Time has entered a paradoxical situation," wrote Jerry Sinise, Farm Editor of *High Plains Agriculture* out of Amarillo, Texas. "Three hundred years ago, 80 percent of the people were farming, and it was a novelty to go to the Big City. Today, 92 per cent of the people work in the city, and it's now a novelty to go to the farm. This turn about is producing another cash crop for the farmer—vacationers."¹³³ Another author observed that "hospitality is a fast growing crop that's putting extra income into farmer's pockets and providing vacation bargains for city families."¹³⁴ *Time* magazine referred to the "Recreation Crop" in March 1963 in a bit part on the new USDA farm recreation program. "Farmers grow too much on too much land. City wage earners have money, free weekends, but nowhere to go. Trying to alleviate these dual problems, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has instituted a program offering family farmers long-term loans up to \$60,000."¹³⁵

The rhetoric of various new "crops" for America's farms provided a way to understand the new uses of American farms in a traditional way—as both public and

"but many of them are." ("The Best Playground of All," *Parents' Magazine*, reprinted in the *Guide*, 13-14). In the similar vein of avoiding city-stress, Malcom McTear Davis, editor of *Travel* magazine, observed, "with cities growing bigger and nerves growing tauter, the idea of vacationing out in the wide open spaces becomes ever more appealing." ("Ranches—Du Far-West," *Guide*, "West" section, 2). As USDA materials did, Davis made a distinction between the long-standing tradition of "dude ranches" and staying at working family ranches: "Vacationing at dude ranches is far from a new idea, but visiting a family on a real working ranch where only a couple of rooms are open for guests is a novelty in the travel field" (2).

¹³³ Jerry Sinise, "'Beatle-Type' Bugs Farmer," *High Plains Agriculture*, reprinted in the *Guide*, "Midwest" section, 4.

¹³⁴ "FM in the Milking Parlor," *Commerce* magazine, reprinted in the *Guide*, "Midwest" section, 3.

¹³⁵ "The Land: The Recreation Crop," *Time*, March 22, 1963, 55.

private agendas attempted to shift from a landscape of classic production to a landscape of consumption in the postwar era. "A new product for America's farmlands and open spaces is *outdoor fun* for city people," declared one USDA pamphlet.¹³⁶ In 1966, when the program was well under way, another report concluded, "Outdoor recreation is a big business. It requires skill and careful planning, but it is a new and growing farm crop."¹³⁷ Outdoor recreation was becoming a primary source of income for many rural landowners, the report further observed, and it was the USDA's role to accelerate this trend in its attempt to guide land-use change and the fast-paced forces of transformation in the American countryside.¹³⁸

Indeed, federal conservation policy as implemented by the USDA formed a key part of federal efforts to strengthen and revitalize rural America, relieve stress on the agricultural industry, expand outdoor recreation resources and guide new and changing relationships between rural and urban America. The farmland recreation agenda, as it emerged in law and in practice at the end of 1962 under the broader conservation and land use adjustment agenda in the farm program, served as a way to boost family farm income, support smaller farms, support suburban and urban agrarian ideals and as a force in the larger development visions for improvement held by the Kennedy administration. USDA postwar conservation ideology would continue to expand and grow, becoming part of the Johnson Administration's national attack on poverty, "new conservation" agenda and vision of the future—the Great Society.

¹³⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Rural Recreation Enterprises for Profit: An Aid to Rural Areas Development* (Washington, DC: GPO, October 1963).

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *USDA Helps Expand Outdoor Recreation for FUN and PROFIT* (Washington, DC: GPO, October 1966), 16.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 3: In Search of the Good Life: A New Conservation for a Great Society

Introduction

This chapter explores how the conservation agenda for private lands enacted during the Kennedy administration contributed to the goals and visions of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society. The new dimensions of conservation policy forged during the early 1960s remained a central part of the Rural Areas Development agenda of the federal Department of Agriculture in the mid to late 1960s and targeted the Johnson administration's larger efforts to reform and improve society. Federal conservation policies attempted to enact a rural and agrarian vision of liberal reform that prioritized natural beauty, open space and agrarian heritage at the same time that they addressed solving the problems of urban America—crowding, blight, waste and poverty.

The broadening of conservation ideology under Johnson not only included new uses for private, rural lands—and what this natural heritage meant and could contribute to building a great society beyond food production—but also new conservation approaches for the nation's cities and an increased emphasis on preserving and appreciating natural beauty. In the fall of 1964, Johnson discussed these new directions and goals for federal conservation policy, calling for a “new conservation” to meet the needs of the time. Ultimately, President Johnson, Freeman and others saw rural America's resources and viability as fundamentally linked to the fate of urban America. Private, rural lands conservation thus became a tool to reform all parts of the nation, not just rural America.

Agricultural Conservation, the War on Poverty and Creating the "Good Life"

The Department of Agriculture's new rural conservation programs, including farm recreation, comprised part of larger federal conservation, development and reform agendas during the 1960s. In addition to the USDA Rural Areas Development programs, Congress authorized the creation of the Area Redevelopment Administration, also an outgrowth of Congressional action in the 1950s, on May 1, 1961.¹ The ARA specifically targeted labor markets in areas of economic distress and poverty, both urban and rural, though it did not focus on big cities. The distressed mining and rural communities of Appalachia comprised one targeted area. Appalachia, and West Virginia in particular, had captured Kennedy's interest after his 1960 campaign tour introduced him to the area's poverty.² In 1963, spurred by his campaign experiences and a request from the Conference of Appalachian Governors, Kennedy called for the creation of a President's Appalachian Regional Commission, formed April 9, 1963 to focus on the region's economic development. A permanent Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was created in 1965, and along with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) also created in 1965, succeeded the ARA, which was dismantled at the same time. Both the ARC and EDA continue to this day, promoting development through training, natural

¹ For the only full-length scholarly account on the Area Redevelopment Administration, see Gregory S. Wilson, *Communities Left Behind: The Area Redevelopment Administration, 1945-1965* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2009). What became the Area Redevelopment Administration Act passed in 1961 began as the "Depressed Areas Act" introduced by Senator Paul Douglas (D-IL) in 1955. As a senator, Kennedy had been involved in and supported the Douglas bill, chairing a regional hearing on it in Boston.

² Wilson, *Communities*, 54.

resources, recreation and tourism.³ Kennedy also launched urban renewal programs designed to attack problems in America's cities, which laid the foundation for the War on Poverty.⁴

In addition to these development agendas, Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall guided other federal conservation initiatives. Much of this activity reflected growing concerns and ideals, that would by the late 1960s be associated with a self-conscious environmental movement, such as, wilderness preservation, concern over water, air and land pollution and ecological health. In 1961, the Cape Cod National Seashore was created and strengthening amendments to the Water Pollution Control Act enacted. Per the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) recommendation, a Bureau of Recreation was established within the Department of Interior in 1962. Using the ORRRC as a "springboard," the administration promoted wilderness protection and the creation of new shoreline preserves and national parks.⁵ On September 4, 1964, President Johnson signed the Wilderness Act, creating permanent wilderness preservation areas on federal lands, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which authorized the appropriation of that fund to match grants to states for outdoor recreation resources and

³ Wilson, *Communities*, xxii.

⁴ The origins of the War on Poverty, as with the federal civil rights agenda, lay in the Kennedy Administration. Allen J. Matusow details the liberal concern with cities, Kennedy's interest in urban renewal and the 1962 Manpower Development and Training Act, which attempted to give workers pushed out of industries by technologies new skills. (Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of American Liberalism in the 1960s* [New York: Harper & Row, 1984], 102). In addition, Jane Jacobs' work, published in 1961, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961) focused attention on the nation's urban problems. Jacobs rejected modernist and rational urban planning and charged such policies destroyed inner city communities. Instead of separating uses for urban spaces (ie, into residential, commercial and industrial), Jacobs advocated dense, mixed-use urban centers that would preserve urban neighborhoods. Interestingly this mixed-use idea had elements in common with the multiple-use ideology at the heart of new private lands conservation ideas in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁵ Thomas G. Smith, "John Kennedy, Stewart Udall, and New Frontier Conservation," *Pacific Historical Review* 64:3 (1995): 340.

for land acquisitions for federal agencies. These two actions culminated years of activity from government and non-government forces alike and signified major successes for a growing movement concerned about the environment.

These developments all occurred within and contributed to an expanding and ambitious liberal agenda of the federal government that encompassed concerns about the state of the natural world, the desire to eradicate poverty, the insurance of civil rights and the facilitation of the "good life" for all Americans. After President Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, Lyndon Johnson vowed to continue with Kennedy's plans and programs as president. He also began to unveil his own ambitious plans.⁶ In his State of the Union Address in January 1964, Johnson announced his administration's "unconditional war on poverty in America."

When asked to identify programs from the Department of Agriculture that would be relevant to a developing anti-poverty program, Freeman made certain to focus on the importance and versatility of conservation measures. He asked the White House to note that running through all the Department's recommendations was a "common thread...a new thrust seeking to shape all our rural programs to eliminate poverty. Conservation becomes thus not merely to hold the soil on the hillside, but to use the hillside for the best purpose for all concerned."⁷

In contrast to preservation measures, such as the Wilderness Act, that have been closely aligned with the emergence of modern environmentalism during this period,

⁶ As Ira Bernstein explains in *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), at the same time that Johnson wanted to honor Kennedy's legacy, he had begun to compete with him (34).

⁷ Freeman to Theodore C. Sorenson, special Counsel to the President, 10 December 1963, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker.

agricultural conservation adhered to classic wise-use conservation philosophy, building on both Progressive and New Deal foundations. It remained fundamentally concerned with how humans used (or misused) nature. As conservation in the previous periods had been, conservation during the 1960s remained a critical tool for improving all of society and its people—not just for improving natural resources. Federal conservation policy as implemented by the USDA targeted places where people *lived*, built communities and developed economies; it sought new uses of rural natural resources to improve human life and the natural world. These uses now included recreation, nature watching, developing wildlife habitat and hunting spaces. In contrast to the earlier periods, however, and reflecting the influences of new postwar concerns attributed most often by scholars to environmentalism, USDA federal conservation policy was not only concerned with traditional production goods from the land, but also focused on the direct consumption of the outdoors. Postwar conservation as implemented through the USDA was fundamentally concerned with protecting the physical beauty of agrarian outdoor spaces and the health of the broader environment in which farms and rural communities existed—for the rural people who lived there and the rest of Americans who wanted to visit.

Freeman saw agricultural programs playing an important role in the developing War on Poverty. “Many of our programs, particularly those which broaden the base of the rural economy and those which insure more equitable distribution of food abundance, help eliminate the causes of poverty,” he wrote in June 1964.⁸ In February 1964,

⁸ Freeman to Harold R. Lewis, 4 June 1964, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker.

Freeman had announced a "Rural Renewal Program" a new set of loans and technical assistance that followed much the same format and sought to achieve the same goals as the already existent Rural Areas Development program, but whose creation was directly related to the War on Poverty.⁹ Central to playing a role in the war on poverty was cooperating with the newly created Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) headed by Sargent Shriver and tasked with overseeing and administering the entire anti-poverty agenda. The Economic Opportunity Act, the central legislation of the War on Poverty passed in August 1964, gave the OEO some overlapping responsibilities with the USDA, authorizing the office to act as a lender of last resort for rural families, to give loans to purchase land, improve the operations of family farms, facilitate participation in cooperative ventures and finance "non-agricultural business enterprises."¹⁰ These similar responsibilities brought the OEO into contact with the USDA, and also caused bureaucratic tensions at times.

Ultimately, though, the OEO focused the majority of its attention, funding and energy on urban problems, and the resources it devoted to rural development proved quite minimal. Like many who "rediscovered poverty in the 1960s," argues historian James Patterson, the OEO planners focused on "a vision of poverty in the cities" and paid little

⁹ "Secretary Freeman Announces Start of Rural Renewal Program," USDA Press release, 24 February 1964, NAL USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XIII. The 1964 Rural Renewal appropriation for the Department of Agriculture included \$1.2 million for the rural renewal program, to be implemented in five pilot areas: Little River County, Arkansas; Washington, Walton and Holmes counties, Florida; Monroe and Appanoose Counties, Iowa; Dallas and Hickory Counties, Missouri; and Mineral and Hardy Counties, West Virginia. This rural renewal assistance was designed to help residents in those areas purchase and develop land for efficient family farms, public recreation, reforestation, housing and other needs.

¹⁰ Dennis Roth, "The Johnson Administration and the Great Society," *Federal Rural Development Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2002), 1.

attention to rural America. This reality, as scholars have explored, had much to do with the Civil Rights Movement and the association of poverty with race and urban issues.¹¹ Furthermore, the majority of the economists and sociologists who helped design the War on Poverty were "better acquainted and more comfortable dealing with the conditions of urban life than with the rural economy and society."¹² The OEO, and by extension, the War on Poverty's "almost exclusively urban cast" irked Freeman and would grow to become a bone of contention as the agenda played out in the 1960s.¹³ He advocated strongly that rural America be given equal attention and resources in the anti-poverty program, arguing that urban and rural welfares depended on one another.

The Department of Agriculture worked to connect its existing programs to the developing anti-poverty program. Everyone needed to understand the "full dimensions of rural poverty," declared Farmers Home Administrator Howard Bertsch in May 1964.

¹¹ As Michael B. Katz explores in *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989) in the early 1960s, the resurgent interest in poverty did not focus on cities or race. Michael Harrington's famous 1962 book, *The Other America*, in fact, focused a great deal on white rural America and Appalachian poverty (*The Other America: Poverty in the United States* [New York: Macmillan, 1962]). Post 1964, however, the civil rights movement and the advent of urban riots "refocused" the meaning of poverty as an urban problem most seriously affecting blacks. "The fusion of race, poverty, and cities became the tacitly accepted starting point among radicals, liberals, and conservatives for debates about policy and reform," writes Katz (23). This timing coincided with the launching of the War on Poverty under Johnson. The War on Poverty, writes Ira Katznelson in "Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?" became entirely associated with the problems of black Americans (Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], 185-211).

¹² Mark I. Gelfand, *The War on Poverty, 1964-1968, Part II: Records of the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, 1966-1967*, The Presidential Documents Series Guide to the Microfilm Edition (University Publications of America, 1993), v.

¹³ James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 146. Patterson concludes, with the exception of OEO's "ill-financed rural loan program, the war on poverty did virtually nothing to alleviate destitution in the countryside, where almost 40 percent of the poor still lived in 1965." In his estimation, the scholar James L. Sundquist, who worked on the War on Poverty, concluded "accurately" that many urban poverty thinkers had "written off the rural areas, and have concluded that the only way to deal with rural poverty is to let the people move and then handle them in the cities" (146). Freeman would work actively against this type of thinking, seeing the rural-urban migration not as a solution to problems, but the root of many of America's most challenging problems (see Chapter 5).

“We are not talking about a “few farm families bypassed in the march toward technological progress.” No, the figure was more like 16 million Americans—one in every 12—a population more than twice the size of New York City’s five boroughs. The federal government, states and private organizations ran a slew of programs targeting rural poverty, he recognized, but “with all due respect to these programs, and the often dedicated people in charge, we are not getting the job done.” Americans’ lives moved with “1960 rapidity, while most of the programs we have set up to deal with this overriding national problem of poverty are still attuned to an earlier, less complex, slower-moving era.”¹⁴

As has been explored, one of the Rural Areas Development goals from the beginning was to address the problem of rural poverty, and the new dimensions of conservation policy based around land-use adjustment were geared to that purpose, among others. As Freeman had remarked in April 1963, the Food and Agriculture Act had given the Department a “bundle of tools” with which to tackle problems facing agricultural and rural America. Among the tools were the recreation conservation projects of the Soil Conservation Service and the Farmers Home Administration, rural housing for the aged and guaranteed loans for nonfarm rural residents. These programs,

¹⁴ “Extent and Nature of Rural Poverty with Particular Emphasis on the Boxed-In Group with Severely Limited Opportunities and Proposed Programs under Title III, Economic Opportunity Act of 1964,” Summary of Statement by Howard Bertsch, Administrator, FHA, before the Rural Development Committee, 20 May 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4100, Folder, “Committees (Rural Areas Development) Feb. 1 - June 24, 1964.” At that time, Bertsch viewed the creation of a Presidential office to “direct the anti-poverty war” as an innovative and positive step, something that “has long been needed.” He saw the Economic Opportunity program as a way to further enable the Farmers Home Administration to rehabilitate poor farm families “in place” and provide “selected low-income families who show a definite potential of succeeding in agriculture with an opportunity to acquire land.” Shriver’s office, he concluded, “holds promise of standing as a new force within the government that can shape, focus and direct all of the many different efforts going forward.”

as Freeman had argued before, would bring additional opportunities to rural America, create more jobs, expand industry, create a better balance of land-use, protect the nation's natural resources and strengthen the family farm pattern of agriculture.¹⁵

Now the Rural Areas Development agenda was being incorporated into a high profile national attack on poverty. The marginal family farmer could be helped toward a satisfactory level of income through job training for off-farm employment and alternative uses of land such as "on-the-farm recreation," concluded the Family Farm Subcommittee of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Areas Development in May 1964.¹⁶ The Subcommittee on Recreation recognized that farm and rural recreation would also combat poverty: "Although far from being the total answer to the war on poverty, recreation was nevertheless a substantial factor." Recreation enterprises, if properly planned, could serve as a basis for economic adjustment in "backward" areas, raise community income levels, and help many farmers, including those operating on a marginal basis.¹⁷ Recreation's potential to diversify rural economies and increase struggling farmers' incomes was key in addressing the problem of rural poverty and encouraging rural renewal, which is what the program had stated from the start.

To be most effective in this accelerating agenda, however, the Recreation Subcommittee concluded that farm recreation programs needed to be adjusted, particularly the distinction the Department made between farm and recreation income and

¹⁵ "The Un-Told Story of American Agriculture," Remarks by Freeman to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Publications 4-2-1, Articles by Secretary, Jan 1-Aug 27."

¹⁶ "Family Farm Subcommittee Report," presented at the National Advisory Committee on Rural Areas Development Meeting, 11-12 May 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4100, Folder, "Committees (Rural Areas Development) June 25, 1964-."

¹⁷ Ibid.

the Farmers Home Administration requirement that farmers remain in traditional farming after the loan was made. To members of the Subcommittee, the distinction between recreation and farm income was unjustifiable if the ultimate goal was to attack rural poverty. Many others agreed that the distinction was unhelpful, as Weaver had in his original tour of recreation enterprises on farms, though not all for the same reasons. The refusal to recognize recreation farming as real "farming" and the stipulation that the applicant remain a traditional farmer struck Senator Phillip Hart (D-MI) as "almost self-defeating" if one of the goals was to take land out of cultivation to curb the commodity surplus problem. If the Department of Agriculture wanted the individual to succeed at the conversion, why did it limit him to such a small-scale operation, he wondered. Hart also suggested a "liberalization" of the restraints to maximize federal assistance.¹⁸

Congress, however, had made it clear that it expected the USDA to concentrate its lending activities, as far as individual farmers were concerned, on those not larger than family size.¹⁹ John Baker explained to Senator Hart that the Farmers Home Administration loan restrictions came from the legislative history of the writing of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, which made it clear loans would not be permitted to anyone but farmers who would continue to farm. For this reason, Baker explained, the total operation of the farm had to fall under the "family farm concept."

As the farm recreation and land use adjustment program progressed, it was becoming clear its various goals of preserving the traditional family farm, increasing

¹⁸ Philip Hart to John A. Baker, 25 November 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 2 to."

¹⁹ John A. Baker to Philip Hart, 11 December 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 2 to."

farm incomes, targeting rural poverty, revitalizing rural communities, conserving natural resources, curbing agricultural production and providing outdoor recreation resources looked complimentary on paper, but in practice emerged in tension with each other depending on which goal held the highest priority.²⁰ In this tension, dependent on a particular hierarchy of values that could change, the new dimensions of conservation policy shared something in common with farm and natural resource policy more broadly.

Questioning Federally Funded Farm Recreation

While the restriction that the farmer remain in traditional farming after the recreation loan was made was contested, federal administrators did not argue with the idea that the borrowers should be traditional farmers, and in this sense the Farmers Home Administration lending program still targeted supporting family farmers and raising their incomes. Rural landowners who had nothing to do with traditional farming, and did not necessarily struggle financially, or who had already left the farming business—a

²⁰ One solution to this conundrum was redefining and expanding what "farming" was in this new era. Farm recreation, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) argued in a December 1963 memorandum, was in fact farming. "We believe that outdoor recreation involving the use of land, water and related resources should be considered a bona fide farming enterprise," wrote Soil Conservation Service Administrator D.A. Williams. The "restrictions on the individual loans wherein a borrower must remain in farming after the loan is made are too rigid." The SCS did not believe that the requirements should be "relaxed to the point that all landowners could qualify as borrowers." Borrowers should be restricted to farmers and part-time farmers, but after the loan was made borrowers needed to be allowed to "develop their resources for income-producing outdoor recreation enterprises as a primary source of their income." (Memo from D.A. Williams to John A. Baker, 3 December, 1963, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker). The program, in other words, still needed to target only farmers, but then allow them to maximize profit. From a purely economic perspective, the Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS) agreed. The Farmers Home Administration (FHA) loan restrictions could limit the development of profitable commercial recreation enterprises, in the Service's estimation, because many would be too small-scale to yield a satisfactory return on investment. The FHA needed to be relieved of the restriction that required recreation borrowers to continue to "derive a substantial part of their income from traditional farming enterprises." Lifting that restriction would likely encourage the development of larger-scale and full time recreation enterprises in rural areas (Memo from the ERS Administration to John A. Baker, 25 October 1965, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker).

population that was continuing to increase during the postwar years—wanted a piece of the action and found the farmer-borrower restriction frustrating, particularly if one of the goals was to make more recreation spaces available to the public.

One man, a Mr. Clark, had previously converted his entire farm to recreational enterprises in Calhoun County, Iowa. With the creation of the M&H Ranch, Clark had moved out of traditional farming entirely and was now ineligible for a FHA loan. "I feel that buying and selling horses should have as much consideration as a cattle enterprise or any other as far as FHA loan eligibility is concerned," wrote Fred R. McLain, Chairman of the Iowa Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation State Committee. "Mr. Clark's conversion of cropland to a golf course has created no problems in any way...I recognize the judgment factor involved since this program is meant to assist the family farmer in rounding out a program that will improve his economic status and at the same time cut down on the production of surplus crops. If the county and state committees were given more latitude in making the determination of who is and who is not a farmer it would help considerably since there appears to be many borderline instances where agencies cannot agree."²¹

²¹ Fred R. McClain, Chairman, Iowa Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation State Committee to the Department, 13 November 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 29-Dec. 31." In a similar vein, and reflecting again the collision of the various goals of the program once put into practice, C.R. Agnew of the New York office of the Camping council requested that the program be expanded to include all rural landowners, particularly if one of the goals was to make more outdoor recreation space for the public. "I feel that if it is valid for the Government to aid farmers to create recreation facilities to meet the public demand for outdoor recreation, then it is also valid for the government to extend the same aid to other private landowners," he wrote (C.R. Agnew to the Department, 6 November 1962, NA, RG 16, Box 4010, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1-Mar 22"). John Baker's response demonstrated how the new program was still developing and growing: "It has taken some time for us to adapt new, as well as old, authorities to the program of income-producing recreation for rural lands" (John A. Baker to C.R. Agnew, 21 March 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1-Mar 22").

Another area that demonstrated the program's growing pains as well as its intersection with other major movements of the time was the realm of civil rights. The Department of Agriculture saw it was

Others expressed concern with the overall farm recreation program's agenda and its broader consequences for American society. The kind of development the farm recreation and agricultural land use agenda espoused did not sit well with all, especially those concerned with preserving wildlands and untouched open space. The farm and rural recreation movement did not bode well for wilderness or for preserving the aesthetic quality of the land, argued J. Michael Mcloskey the Northwest representative of the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs. To him, the farm recreation program agenda illustrated American conservation's "schizoid nature," which encompassed a conflict of purposes and was embodied in the split between Gifford Pinchot and John Muir. The impact of farm recreation on the land and public recreation in general disturbed those of the Muir tradition, Mcloskey explained, because it had no regard for aesthetic quality and pitted those more interested in natural resources against those interested in activities. Furthermore, farm recreation also perfectly illustrated what America had become: a

getting into new territory with its recreation program and public access to private lands. "With the development of recreation on private land, we face some problems new to the Department," wrote M.L. Church, a USDA Staff Economist to John Baker and Willard Cochrane in January 1963. In 1963, the Department adhered to private landowners' rights, even if that allowed them to discriminate. Upchurch recommended that the farmer "be permitted to sell his recreational facilities in whatever way he deems best, even though this lets him discriminate among people on economic, social, or other grounds." However, if the recreation facility developed under the federal programs were not being made available to those beyond the operator and his family/intimate friends, the Department had the right to recall the loans or require payment of cost-shares and other adjustment payments. At the beginning of the program, the USDA gave loan and financial support to finance segregated recreation facilities, which the NAACP vociferously protested. Ultimately, in the wake of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act, which signaled the death knell of Jim Crow, federal funds could no longer be used to finance segregated spaces, and the fact that the farm recreation program had helped to create such institutions became an embarrassment for Freeman and the USDA by the late 1960s (M.L. Upchurch to John A. Baker through Willard Cochrane, "Public Access to Recreation on Private Land," 17 January 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1-Mar 22").

"mass consumption society where most commodities are consumed not as 'necessities' but as surplus amusement at an artificially stimulated rate of turnover."²²

Indeed, in terms of the emerging environmental movement that associated more with wilderness preservation than traditional wise-use conservation policy, the land use adjustment agenda held a tricky position. The farm recreation program helped to transform a landscape of production into a direct landscape of consumption with the new "crops" of recreation, and building a golf course on farmland did not necessarily constitute preserving open space for some who were more concerned with untouched and unused natural areas (concerns often associated by scholars with modern environmentalism). On the other hand, farmland recreation encompassed a wide range of activities that sought to achieve a high quality of life and facilitated interaction with the outdoors, from golf courses to vacation farms to hunting and fishing. Furthermore, farms were already working, used landscapes to begin with. One of the motivations of the program was to preserve both open space from other kinds of development going on at the time (suburbs, airports, defense industries) and an agrarian ethic quite different from a wilderness ethic of undisturbed nature.

The farmland recreation agenda worked to both preserve a particular vision of a working farm and support actual working farms, and aesthetic quality did matter toward those ends. Consumers of farm recreation wanted the peaceful, beautiful countryside—the middle landscape simultaneously idealized and real. In their concern with "quality of life" conservation programs in the form of farmland recreation differed from previous

²² J. Michael Mcloskey, "The Outlook for Cooperation in Conservation," address to the Annual Meeting of the Oregon Chapter of the Soil Conservation Society of America, 6 December 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, Oct. 29-Dec. 31."

conservation agendas that did not have this postwar concern at their heart. At the same time, the new uses of private lands geared toward improving quality of life for all Americans shared fundamental motivations with the emerging environmentalist concerns and goals with beauty.

If for some, farm recreation did not present an unqualified good when it came to the natural world, others questioned the agenda as a solution to societal problems. Edward Kosicky, Director of Conservation in the Conservation Department in East Alton, Illinois found the way that the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission was hailed as a "possible cure all for crop surpluses, urban renewal and computer jitters" problematic. "Never have so many tried to crawl onto the popular outdoor recreational bandwagon," he observed. So many were, in fact, that it was "difficult—if not impossible—to tell who is guiding the wagon and the direction in which it is going." Now that recreation seemed to provide all kinds of societal solutions, in his opinion, agencies that were toying with recreational activities in the past suddenly instigated programs on outdoor recreation.²³ Some doubted the program's ability to curb surplus production, as had the Farm Bureau and *Wall Street Journal*.

Others questioned whether making farms into recreation spaces for urban and suburban consumption would be a positive development for rural communities and sustaining rural life. "A museumlike motif was developing in rural areas in response to urban demand," Pennsylvania State social scientist Roy C. Buck observed in an article for the 1963 *Yearbook of Agriculture*. If one paid, one could see a lumber camp, a

²³ Edward Kosicky, Director of Conservation, Conservation Department, East Alton, Illinois, "Leadership for Recreation Boom," keynote speech at the South Dakota Wildlife Federation annual convention, 28-30 August 1964, NA RG 16, Box 4169, "Recreation Program, Jan. 1 to Apr. 17."

country lawyer's office and a cotton plantation. In the summer of 1962, Buck recounted, a Cleveland businessman "purchased the right to live on a farm for a week during blackberry season." He had gone 35 years without picking berries, and the farm wife found it rather odd, but the next summer planned to "advertise berrypicking as an added attraction." This "museum quality" and recreational value of rural areas would continue to increase, Buck predicted. "It will substantially supplement traditional sources of rural income." Such transformations of rural life into "cultural enrichment" had significant "noneconomic as well as economic dimensions" which had to be considered. As "authentic rural culture is used up, a new industry will be born....new meanings will be assigned to the traditional products" of the earth, "which will strengthen their position in the market-place." What Buck predicted was already taking place, and that transition, he warned, "must be done with wisdom, taste and responsibility."²⁴

The compilation in which Buck presented his concerns, the 1963 *Yearbook of Agriculture, A Place to Live*, was devoted to contemplating the broad changes taking place in American life, particularly the new rural America that was emerging, and raised the fundamental question of how to ensure America would always be a "good place to live." The renewal of cities, growth of suburbs, movements of people, enlargement of some farms, the disappearance of others, shifts in land use, and changes in relationships in rural and urban America alike brought both hope and challenge. A "new economic order" was taking shape across America—on its farms, in rural America and in cities.

²⁴ Roy C. Buck, "An Interpretation of Rural Values," *A Place to Live: The 1963 Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1963), 1-12.

This new order brought benefits and problems. It had left many disadvantaged, both in rural and urban America, and demonstrated how linked the fates of rural and urban America were. The federal initiatives devoted to rural areas aimed not to revitalize rural areas alone, but to “revitalize and recapitalize town and country.” Only in recognizing the impact of change in all of these places, and their relationships to each other could America truly become and remain a “good place to live,” a place of striving, beauty, fairness and equality.²⁵

Toward the New Conservation and a Great Society

Four months after he declared an unconditional war on poverty, President Lyndon Johnson outlined his vision for the Great Society—the vision that would go beyond the eradication of poverty and drive his massive domestic reform agenda. Before an audience at the University of Michigan in May 1964, he spoke of the challenges and promise of moving beyond simply a rich and powerful society to becoming a “Great Society.” This society demanded an end to poverty and racial injustice, but that was just the “beginning” of a larger vision. The Great Society was a place of many things—a place to use leisure to “build and reflect” instead of causing fear and restlessness, a place where people served not only the “demands of commerce” but also the “desire for beauty and the hunger of community.” This society, in Johnson’s mind, would be built in three main places: the cities, the countryside and in the classrooms of America. Here, America could craft a civilization where material progress merely provided a foundation

²⁵ *A Place to Live*, v, vi.

for a “richer life of mind and spirit.” Though Johnson explicitly tied America’s fate to its cities—“our society will never be great until our cities are great”—the countryside was also a critical place for reform and renewal, for the Great Society. There, Americans could connect with open space and natural heritage and appreciate a society that offered more than just prosperity, but instilled greater values. A vibrant agrarian America, proved vital in quest for the “good life,” which included thriving communities and a healthy, beautiful natural world.²⁶ This vision continued to drive policymaking under Johnson.

Indeed, the “good life” that the Great Society sought to establish for all Americans required a healthy, progressive and innovative relationship with the natural world—a new kind of conservation. In a little-noted speech in Oregon in September 1964, Johnson first introduced the concept of the “new conservation” that would be at the heart of the Great Society. America stood at the close of the “greatest conservation Congress in the history of the United States of America,” Johnson informed his audience, referring to the 30 conservation measures the 88th Congress had pushed through, including the Wilderness Act and the Land and Conservation Fund. But, it was not enough to just continue, he warned. Echoing Stewart Udall’s words two years earlier at the White House Conference on Conservation, Johnson argued that America’s problems were growing and changing and conservation approaches had to change to meet them. In his estimation, three major forces were bringing a “new era of conservation:” a growing

²⁶ “Great Society Speech,” May 1964, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Volume 1, 1963-64* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1965), 704-707. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur, *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), xiv.

population, the triumph of technology and the waste products of "progress" and finally, urbanization and the crowding of Americans into cities—a crowding that denied people access to beauty and destroyed "ancient values."²⁷

In the development of the "new conservation," Johnson planned to push forward on five fronts, efforts that mixed aspects of more traditional conservation philosophy with other ideals: securing and developing new outdoor recreation areas, especially close to concentrations of population; controlling the waste products of technology; utilizing technology to increase mastery over the environment; preventing urbanization and growth from ravaging the land; and conducting conservation on a global scale. The new conservation, Johnson explained, outlining how it differed from older interpretations, "is not just the classic conservation of protection and development, but it is a creative conservation of restoration and innovation. Its concern is not with nature alone, but with the total relation between man and the world around him. Its object is not just man's welfare, but the dignity of his spirit." Toward these greater ends, the new conservation and the Great Society would work.²⁸

Johnson further elaborated on these Great Society goals in his 1965 State of the Union address and subsequent special messages to Congress. In his "Special Message to Congress on Conservation and the Restoration of Natural Beauty" on February 8, 1965,

²⁷ "LBJ Eyes Urban 'Wilderness'," *The Washington Post*, September 24, 1964. The article focused on Johnson's emphasis on a new conservation for urban areas. It noted that his Portland talk was over shadowed by Johnson's disclosure of new defense systems.

²⁸ "Remarks on Conservation at a Breakfast in Portland saluting the Northwest-Southwest Power Transmission Intertie," 17 September 1964, *The Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu. Where exactly the term the "new conservation" originated is unclear at this time, but one likely source is the Department of Interior and more specifically, Stewart Udall.

Johnson reiterated his Portland message and definition of the "new conservation." He further outlined measures to implement the agenda, with a particular emphasis on the preservation and conservation of natural beauty. His ambitious agenda spanned attacking water and air pollution, reforming highway development, preserving open space in cities and the beauty of the countryside. As he had done with the Portland speech, Johnson focused on applying conservation measures to America's cities—a defining component of the "new conservation." But he did not neglect rural America. Much of the necessary work for improving the beauty of privately owned lands could be done within existing Department of Agriculture programs without adding too much cost, Johnson anticipated.

Over his 33 years in public life, he had seen the American system "move to conserve the natural and human resources of our land." The Tennessee Valley Authority had transformed an entire region out of depression. The Civilian Conservation Corps had replanted America's forests, helping Gifford Pinchot's sustained yield concept "take hold on forestlands." Today, Americans needed to understand "the beauty of our land is a natural resource," Johnson asserted, and its preservation was "linked to the inner prosperity of the human spirit." The tradition of America's past was "equal to today's threat to that beauty" and the current generation's stewardship of the natural world would be judged by the "foresight with which we carry out these programs. We must rescue our cities and countryside from blight with the same purpose and vigor" as more traditional conservation programs had moved to save forests and conserve soil health. Toward this end, Johnson announced that a White House Conference on Natural Beauty, chaired by Laurance Rockefeller, who had headed the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review

Commission, would take place in May of that year and hoped that the Conference would produce “new ideas and approaches for enhancing the beauty of America.” It could ideally serve as a focal point for Americans to alert them to the “danger to their natural heritage and to the need for action.”²⁹

When it came to making the Great Society in the countryside, conservation efforts had played and would continue to play a key role in addressing the challenges rural Americans faced, an assertion Johnson made in both his messages on conservation and agriculture. In his “Special Message to the Congress on Agriculture,” on February 4, 1965, Johnson recognized the changing rural scene in America and the difficulties it had wrought for many—a situation that called for a “national policy for rural America with parity of opportunity as its goal.” The efforts of the Area Redevelopment Administration, the community programs authorized under the Economic Opportunity Act and rural development efforts of the Department of Agriculture worked toward this goal of parity. In particular, Johnson mentioned the “wide range of programs” administered through the USDA to assist in rural economic development, including loans for telephone systems, for recreation, for the development of forest resources, community water systems and rural housing. These and other government programs supporting the building of community facilities, outdoor recreation, small businesses, health and education programs all assisted rural businessmen and farmers to revive “dying economies.”

²⁹ “Special Message to the Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty,” 8 February 1965, *The Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

Furthermore, Johnson called for a long term Cropland Adjustment Program to replace the pilot Cropland Conversion Program to reduce the cost of production adjustment efforts, assist landowners in converting their lands to other societal needs, such as forestry and recreation and to assist small farmers to remain in their communities by having opportunity to do other work. Johnson recognized and supported these government efforts, but argued that so much more remained to be done. A gap still remained between levels of living in rural and urban America, and "parity of opportunity" remained a "distant hope for many." It was a challenge to be met "head-on."

In announcing the new conservation, all of the societal challenges it sought to address, and the vision of a more enlightened society it would help to achieve, President Johnson had called for a "policy of conservation broader and more ambitious than any this country has yet known," concluded the *New York Times*. In the past, too often conservation had been wrongly viewed as an "unequal battle between a doughty handful of nature lovers and the implacable forces of city growth and industrial development." But gradually the realization developed, and the President's "unprecedented message" was an indication of this realization, that such a view was false.³⁰

At the "heart of the new conservation" was the concept of "balance," the *Times* argued. More than seven out of ten Americans now lived in urban communities, a reality that any conservation program had to address. There was no romantic or pastoral escape from that fact. The challenge of the new conservation was "to develop a proper balance

³⁰ "The New Conservation—I," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1965.

among man's various necessities"—the need to earn a living, to enjoy the advantages of urban life, the advantages of recreation in an accessible place, to have sparkling rivers and scenic beauty to visit, to protect forests, rivers and other natural resources for the future and to insure that wild creatures remained as "man's companions in his sojourn on earth." A proper balance in society both between human populations and between humans and nature could be found, the *Times* concluded, even though the problems America faced were many-sided and diverse.³¹

The conservation agenda developed by Freeman and others under the Kennedy administration became part of the Johnson administration's "new conservation," and growing liberal agenda to eradicate poverty and create a great society—as did so many of the Kennedy-era initiatives. In the summer of 1964, with the November election in mind, Freeman wrote John Baker, wanting a speech that would contain "the whole concept, dream, philosophy, goal, that we share about Rural America and its part in the Great Society." Though it might be a bit early, Freeman thought it would be "timely to get a maximum exposure on the combined RAD-Conservation-Recreation-Great Society-Rural Renaissance-Rural Capitalization thesis."³² Conservation programs aimed at conserving the beauty and integrity of natural places—including working farms—and the reassignment of land from old uses to new ones to fit the needs of a fast growing urban society were utterly essential for the healthful development of that fast growing society.

Postwar conservation programs were designed to achieve balance, guide new relationships between rural and urban America and innovate new horizons within cities

³¹ Ibid.

³² Freeman to Baker, 11 July 1964, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker.

and on rural lands, though often at the administrative level, resources for urban and rural development were contested and fought over. Freeman called for a "war on poverty in rural America on a scale equal to that which will be carried out in our urban centers," citing the higher incidence of poverty and inadequate housing in rural America. Failure to recognize and sufficiently address rural poverty had forced many "ill-prepared" persons to crowd into America's cities, compounding problems there. Rural renewal was "as vital as urban renewal," Freeman declared. Both rural and urban America had to find their "right place in our country's Great Society."³³ The "new conservation" proposed a harmonious and cooperative effort to restore balance and beauty to America's cities and countryside—and indeed both deserved and needed conservation attention. But when it came to resource allocation and national focus, the cooperative vision often dissolved.

The growing imbalance between rural and urban America and the attention given to urban issues began to worry Freeman and others as they saw trouble in cities brewing and rural poverty deepening. Their troubles and fates were fundamentally intertwined, Freeman and others argued, especially since rural migration to cities was compounding troubles in cities. Conserving, protecting and adjusting rural America's resources became, thus, essential, not just for the health and welfare of rural society, land and life, but for the conservation of the entire nation. This conviction, present in the early 1960s, took on a new urgency and centrality in the mid to late 1960s.

This conviction encompassed major philosophical differences on how to fix the problems of America's cities. Some, including the majority of War on Poverty workers,

³³ "Freeman Asks War on Country Poverty," *The Washington Post*, January 26, 1965.

believed that to fix urban problems, efforts needed to directly target urban areas. Perhaps in a desire to take advantage of the groundswell of national reform, both on the federal level and on the ground, Freeman argued that many of the solutions to urban woes lay in targeting funds and attention to rural America. Agricultural conservation and reform programs would foment rural revitalization, which would in turn relieve the cities. The place to give attention and money was not only to urban America, but also to its rural companion, for the nation's path to the good life and great society would be impossible to achieve without a revitalized countryside.

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The Department of Agriculture continued to find support for its agricultural conservation program and its connections to broader liberal reform goals. An August 1966 report on the Rural Areas Development (RAD) goals and aims revealed RAD's expanded purposes and goals: to build a more prosperous and more attractive rural America with more rapid rural economic growth—higher per person and per family incomes—more adequate community facilities—and a reversal of the rural-urban migration of population.³⁴ The department cited overall increased spending toward the

³⁴ Rural Areas Development goals and aims, 18 August 1966, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, "IVD Rural Areas Development." Both private efforts and public programs were essential for this goal to be reached—efforts and programs that focused on the development of recreation resources, the strengthening of the family farm system of agriculture, conservation and the preservation of open space. The document listed ten "aims," the first of which was to "Preserve and strengthen the family farm system of agriculture." Other aims addressed increasing incomes, expanding rural job opportunities and making "continuous" and "systematic efforts" to eliminate the "many and complex causes of rural poverty." Four aims directly addressed conservation, recreation, and land-use adjustment. They were: #6: "Encourage more rapid development of recreation

achievement of these goals. For example, spending in forestry, watershed protection resource conservation and development had increased from \$73.6 million in 1963 to \$90.7 million in 1967 and all types of Farmers Home Administration loans had increased from \$790.8 million to \$1,361.4 million over the same period.³⁵ On the farm recreation front, by the end of fiscal year 1965, the FHA had given 396 loans to individuals for \$2,350,359 and 174 loans to associations for \$17,848,690 for a total of \$20,199,049.³⁶ By the end of fiscal year 1966, the FHA had loaned a total of \$15.4 million to community associations for recreation, and since 1963 had given 553 individual farmers loans for \$3.5 million. FHA administrator, Howard Bertsch, informed the Secretary that they had been encouraged by favorable and widespread responses to the program.³⁷

Outdoor recreation continued to be touted by the department as a harbinger for new directions in an improved rural America. Outdoor recreation vitally influenced the quality of the total environment in the nation, John A Baker declared in July 1967. "We need this, in America, more today than ever before, and more of it today than ever before.

facilities on rural land to provide farmers and rural businessmen with a new source of income, and at the same time serve the needs of our growing numbers of urban population." #7: "Encourage adjustments of land into patterns which utilize each acre and resource according to its full capabilities and treats each resource and acre as its unique needs require." #8: "Provide technical and financial assistance necessary to conserve, use and develop soil, water, forest, fish and wildlife, and open spaces around our metropolitan centers." #10: "Develop new and improved opportunities for creative and satisfying rural life, work and recreation for all who choose it."

³⁵ In a different report to the Secretary, the Farmers Home Administration compiled figures showing the extent of FHA's activity in rural resource development since January 1961—in housing, community water and sewer systems, recreation facilities and small businesses. "They show that about 2.5 million people have benefited from about 82 billion provided through FHA programs," stated the report, and these figures were in addition to farm ownership and operating loan funds (Biweekly Report on FHA Activities, 1 December 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-15, Folder, "VIB2b(3)(d) Bi-weekly Reports").

³⁶ Memorandum to the Secretary, "FHA Loans for Recreational Purposes," 27 October 1965, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A Baker, Box 1.4/A-15.

³⁷ Biweekly Report on FHA Activities to the Secretary from FHA Administrator Bertsch, "Rural Recreation Development," 26 August 1966, NAL, USDA History Files, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A Baker, Box 1.4/A-15, Folder, "VIB2b(3)(d) Bi-weekly Reports."

In our fast-moving society our spirits need often to be soothed and renewed."³⁸ In February 1967, the Farmers Home Administration informed the Secretary that recreation loans were nearing the 1000 mark. From late 1962 through January 1, 1967, the department had made 953 rural recreation loans for a total of \$43.5 million. Projects operated in 49 states and Puerto Rico, reflecting its national reach.³⁹ A November 1968 press release reported that \$5.5 million had been advanced to individual farm operators and during fiscal year 1968 alone and 226 rural communities received \$24 million to develop recreation centers. Recreation was part of what Freeman called the rebuilding and "roll call of progress" in rural America. There were now more opportunities for recreation in rural America than ever before. Fifteen hundred new recreation centers had been developed since 1963, and nearly 800 family-sized farmers supplemented their income by operating fishing lakes, golf courses and camping areas. In addition to these "new-found opportunities for fun," there was the added benefit of new jobs. Freeman anticipated that by 1980, a million new jobs would be created in rural America by recreation alone.⁴⁰ These would not all come from the specific USDA farm conservation programs, but from the national focus and initiatives on outdoor recreation overall.

An expanded conservation, land use adjustment and farm recreation program would contribute to key Great Society goals: not only the stimulation of struggling

³⁸ Address by John A Baker before the Federal Assistance Institute, National Recreation and Park Association, 18 July 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, "XI B2c (2(a Ass't Sec'y's Jun-Aug 67)".

³⁹ Biweekly Report on FHA Activities to the Secretary from FHA Administrator Bertsch, 24 February 1967, NAL, USDA History Files, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A Baker Box 1.4/A-15, Folder, "VIB2b(3)(d) Bi-weekly Reports."

⁴⁰ Address by Secretary Freeman at the 10th Annual Conference of the National Association of ASCS county office employees, 10 August 1968, Washington, DC, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman July-Oct 68."

economies, but the beautification of the country and increased rural-urban cooperation. Johnson and the USDA recommended that Congress establish a long-term Cropland Adjustment Program (CAP) to replace the pilot Cropland Conversion Program established in the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962.⁴¹ The proposed CAP was designed to expand recreational opportunities and other non-cropland uses at the same time that it assisted landowners to make the long-range adjustments they wanted to make.⁴² Because of the Department's past experience with the pilot Cropland Conversion Program, and the growing demand for recreation and "enthusiasm for preserving and reclaiming our Natural Beauty," the Department expected that large acreages would be moved into new permanent uses through the Cropland Adjustment Program.⁴³

The Cropland Adjustment Program became part of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1965, as did the Greenspan program, which provided funds for state and local governments to buy cropland to convert to recreation and conservation uses. Upon signing the 1965 Act, President Johnson declared that it was a major step toward correcting problems of low farm income and high surplus. Putting his own stamp on what was first a Kennedy era initiative, and asserting the conservation goal of making natural beauty a priority, Johnson declared the legislation would "begin a new era of city-

⁴¹ "Size of Land Use Adjustment Program," Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, 26 March 1963, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, John A. Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-1, Folder, "IB1b Diversion." As early as March 1963, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) had argued for an extended and expanded Cropland Conversion Program. An expansion of this program would reduce costs and establish long-term shifts in land use away from crops.

⁴² Remarks by John A. Baker, at the Wood's Ferry Recreation Area Dedication, Sumter National Forest, Chester County, South Carolina, 16 May 1965, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder "XIB2c(2(a Asst. Sec's & Under Apr-May 65."

⁴³ Ibid. CAP was also the acronym of a major War on Poverty program that focused on urban areas: the Community Action Programs, created by Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act. While much has been written on the urban CAP, very little has been written on the rural CAP (or Cropland Adjustment Program).

country cooperation” as surplus cropland began to be used to increase outdoor recreation and beautification.

Just as important, the farm legislation took its place, Johnson continued, as a “milestone of the most productive and constructive legislative session in our history,” alongside expanded aid to education, immigration reform, medical care for the aged, and voting rights for all Americans—it took its place, in other words, in the Great Society.⁴⁴ Indeed, the passage of domestic legislation in 1964-5 marked the high point of the Great Society. In less than two years, Johnson had signed legislation that touched on nearly all major aspects of daily life. This prolific time not only enjoyed widespread public support for the administration’s massive domestic agenda, but also on the foreign policy front—support that would begin to crumble as the crisis in Vietnam deepened and America’s cities exploded in violence.⁴⁵

Freeman argued for the continuation of the Cropland Adjustment Program as Congress contemplated extending the 1965 Food and Agriculture Act in 1968. The voluntary adjustment programs, “together with the longer term Cropland Adjustment Program have enabled American agriculture to maintain balance,” he argued. The CAP was a vital and necessary part of that total package. The agreements made through the

⁴⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Statement by the President on Signing of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1965,” 4 November 1965, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu. Johnson focused on the “miracle of American agriculture” as an “example to all the world’s billions of the wisdom and the rewards of our democratic system.”

⁴⁵ Terry H. Anderson, *The Sixties*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 71. Johnson had a 70 percent approval rating in 1965 and most Americans “applauded Johnson’s liberalism” writes Anderson. “Most felt the nation was moving forward, that LBJ was fulfilling Kennedy’s idealism—and more.” By 1967 this was no longer the case as Vietnam escalated and the civil rights movement fractured. Riots across America’s cities demonstrated that “LBJ’s guns-and-butter policy, fighting a war abroad and poverty at home, was a failure,” Anderson writes (93). The administration spent over \$300,000 to kill one Vietcong in 1967, but spent only about \$50 on an American in poverty. The “War in Vietnam killed the War on Poverty, and it wounded attempts to continue the Great Society” (94).

program lasted five to ten years, were beneficial to farmers and the public, and were a necessary supplement to the annual adjustment programs. Furthermore, Freeman argued, the program allowed older and part-time farmers to place their farms into conservation use with assurance and thus remain on farms and "enjoy the benefits of rural living."⁴⁶

In addition, Freeman argued, the need for outdoor recreation spaces only continued to increase. CAP helped to meet the outdoor recreation needs of a growing U.S. population. Its public access features opened up more than a million acres of privately-owned farm land for public use in hunting, hiking, and camping. At the same time, farmers' incomes were buoyed with a small per year additional payment.⁴⁷ A Rural Areas Development newsletter in May 1968 further publicized the Cropland Adjustment Program: "The land on which the new recreational opportunities are being found totals 1,069,709 acres concentrated mainly in the Midwest. It is part of the land that farmers have diverted under CAP from crops in plentiful supply to conservation." Under the program, the newsletter explained, many farmers signed agreements with the USDA to open their land to the public for hunting, fishing, trapping and hiking without charge and only a nominal payment from the government.⁴⁸ During 1967, more than one million farmers, including those with low-incomes, participated in agricultural conservation cost-sharing. In addition to recreation, the efforts included establishing vegetative cover, building terraces to halt erosion, and reorganizing irrigation systems. Together, they

⁴⁶ USDA Press Release, 15 January 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74.

⁴⁷ Testimony by Secretary Freeman before the Senate Agricultural Committee, 24 June 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman June 1968."

⁴⁸ Rural Areas Development newsletter, May 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman May 1968."

pointed toward achieving the goals of the Great Society: employing our "agricultural resources in more effectively meeting the requirements of our growing population for living space, recreation, landscape beauty, and an ample supply of clean water."⁴⁹

Freeman also argued for changes to the Farmers Home Administration (FHA) farm recreation loan program to better meet evolving administration goals and requests from the field. Many people, including Department of Agriculture officials, members of Congress and rural landowners themselves, argued for adjustments to the recreation loan program stipulations in order to more fully take advantage of converting farm acres to other uses. "I continue to receive indications that people in rural areas would like to see an expansion in the recreation loan activity of FHA," John Baker wrote to FHA Administrator Howard Bertsch. "Currently, FHA loans for recreation purposes are being restricted to farmers who continue to derive a substantial part of their incomes from traditional farming operations after initiating the recreation enterprise." He realized that Farmers Home Administration policy was based on legislative history, but wondered "if it might not be appropriate at this time to take another look at the problem to see if anything, including possible new legislation, can be done to make our departmental policy more consistent in encouraging the developing of outdoor recreation enterprises on privately owned land."⁵⁰

In 1966 the Farmers Home Administration argued for changes to be made in the basic legislation of the Farmers Home Administration to permit loans geared toward shifting the entire use of one's farmland from the production of crops to income-

⁴⁹ USDA Press Release, 15 January 1968.

⁵⁰ John A. Baker to Howard Bertsch, "FHA Loans for Recreational Purposes," 19 October 1965, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker.

producing recreation enterprises.⁵¹ The proposed amendment would broaden the loan purposes to allow farm owners and tenants to convert their entire acreages to recreational purposes. This change would take the entire acreage out of agricultural production, a desirable goal considering the continuing surplus problem, and would also permit the farmer who had the skill and ability to develop income-producing recreational enterprises to devote his full time to recreation and not be limited to a family farming operation. Further, the Farmers Home Administration argued, this change would bring the Farmers Home Administration more in line with the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and the Soil Conservation Service, which helped farmers to convert entire farms into recreational purposes already.⁵²

Proposed arguments for adopting the amendment to expand the loan program ranged widely and overall demonstrated the shifting priorities of the federal Department of Agriculture and Congress—from a focus on agriculture to a wider rural America. The amendment proposed a shift from specifically targeting and raising the income of family farmers who would remain in traditional farming to support a diversified farm income to helping small farmers shift out of traditional farming altogether in the effort to reach a broader goal of stimulating rural economies. The programs would still seek to raise the income of small farmers, but retaining the family farm core was no longer necessary if it did not meet the economic goals and needs of those farmers, or the broader community.

⁵¹ "A Statement of the Need for Broadening the Authority of the Farmers Home Administration for Making Loans for Recreational Purposes," 2 December 1966, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, "VIA1b(4) Consolidated Farmers Home Legislation."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

Many farmers, the proposal pointed out, "are making more from their recreational enterprise than from farming." Farmers needed to be able to concentrate on the enterprise on their land that brought the greatest return for their efforts. Many part-time farmers in specific held down full-time jobs while they farmed, and the amendment would allow them to maximize their income, regardless of source, while developing a recreation enterprise with a FHA loan.⁵³

Further, the current restrictions that loans be made only to those currently operating family-sized farms barred those who wanted to work with the land in this new way, but who lacked farming experience. The restrictions eliminated "many worthy applicants who could make good use of the recreational resources on farmlands but who are not present or experienced farmers," the Farmers Home Administration argued, and did not necessarily stimulate the greatest use of recreational resources in rural areas. These restrictions also prevented the FHA from rendering maximum assistance to the private sector in stimulating recreational development. Ultimately, in the Department's estimation, one of the greatest benefits "to the broadening of this program," in addition to making facilities available to the public for recreation, was "the fact that it would provide employment and additional income to farmers and rural people where such income is most urgently needed." The loan funds dispersed in the expanding program could help to employ underemployed farmers and rural residents and help stem migration to cities.⁵⁴

That summer of 1968, Congress and the department of agriculture worked to legislate what the President had outlined in February. The bill to amend the Consolidated

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Farmers Home Administration Act of 1961, submitted on June 27, 1968, expanded and changed the farm recreation loan programs. To apply for a recreational loan, the applicant had to be a farmer, rancher or tenant, but the applicant was not required to continue to farm in a traditional way after receiving the initial recreation loan. A new companion authorization would permit farmers and ranchers to convert part or all of their farming operations to outdoor recreational enterprises, though to receive the initial loan he or she would have to be a farmer or rancher.⁵⁵ The major thrust of this legislation, as someone from the department of agriculture explained to Allen J. Ellender, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, "is to improve the income position of small farmers," even if that meant helping them to shift out of farming.⁵⁶

In his testimony before the House Agriculture Committee, Howard Bertsch, head of the Farmers Home Administration, reiterated the Farmers Home Administration's support of the proposed bill—a bill that would enable the administration to "be even more effective in strengthening the economy of rural America." The bill would allow them to be more effective "in helping farmers add to their incomes by developing income-producing recreational enterprises." A survey of 306 farm-based recreational enterprises financed by the FHA showed that nine out of ten borrowers were making a profit and those who had been in the business for more than three years realized an

⁵⁵ "Section-by-Section Analysis of Proposed bill to Amend the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act of 1961," n.d., NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, "VIA1b(4) Consolidated Farmers Home Legislation."

⁵⁶ Letter to Allen J. Ellender, Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, n.d., USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, "VIA1b(4) Consolidated Farmers Home Legislation."

average profit of \$2,143 in addition to farm income. Overall, recreational enterprises added a total of \$1.4 million to the gross income of these 306 borrowers.

Furthermore, this bill was critical because the need for recreational facilities was constantly increasing. Bertsch cited estimates compiled by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation that showed that Americans had paid 6.5 billion visits to facilities for 19 kinds of popular outdoor recreation activities in 1965. The Bureau forecast that the volume would increase to more than 10 billion visits by the year 1980, assuming there were enough facilities to handle the expansion. The proposed legislation would assist the government in addressing these problems by lifting the requirement that those borrowing funds for recreation would have to continue to farm. The ability for a farmer to convert his entire farm to recreation "would be a great boon to the development of needed recreational facilities and enable farmers with marginal operations and with talent for handling a recreation business to make substantial increases in their incomes."⁵⁷ In a press release later that fall, Secretary Freeman asserted the bill would "accelerate this recreation building because farmers will now be able to convert whole farms to recreation."⁵⁸ Congress voted to make these changes to the FHA program and continue with the Cropland Adjustment Program, and Johnson signed these changes into law in August 1968.

⁵⁷ Statement by Howard Bertsch, Administrator, Farmers Home Administration on H.R. 18209 Before the House Agriculture Committee, 1 July 1968, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-11, Folder, "VIA1b(4) Consolidated Farmers Home Legislation."

⁵⁸ "More than 700,000 Rural People Benefit from USDA-Financed Recreation," USDA Press Release, 27 November 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2) Freeman Oct. '68-."

An Expanded Conservation Ideology: Protecting the Land to Protecting Quality of Life

In 1967, the U.S. Department of Agriculture published its annual *Yearbook of Agriculture*, entitled *Outdoors USA*. The title reflected the new directions for the department's policies and American conservation as they had developed during the 1960s. The title demonstrated the department's growing emphasis on outdoor and rural recreation and its interest in suburban and urban needs. The USDA's conservation domain, Freeman pointed out in the foreword, stretched from agricultural valleys and fields to timbered slopes to the tops of mountains, from which "we have a sweeping view of man's total environment—an environment we share with all other living things."⁵⁹

While the book focused on the Department's traditional conservation duties, such as soil health and maintenance, it also addressed new directions in conservation policy it had development and new influences on its programs—of preservation, natural beauty and human interconnectedness with a wider world. The book spoke to President Johnson's call for a "new conservation" to meet the needs of the time, and which echoed emerging environmentalist values—"to restore as well as to protect—to bring beauty to the cities as well as to keep it in the countryside—to handle the waste products of technology as well as the waste of natural resources," as he stated at the White House Conference on Natural Beauty in May of 1965.⁶⁰ Attention to the conservation and preservation of natural beauty, as well as its accessibility to the majority of Americans, that is, bringing beauty "into the daily lives of all our people," were essential "if we are to

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Outdoors USA: The 1967 Yearbook of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1967), Foreword.

⁶⁰ "Remarks of the President," White House Conference on Natural Beauty, 25 May 1965, *Report to the President and the President's Response* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1965).

ever really have a Great Society," Johnson concluded.⁶¹ The Great Society, as Johnson had declared in May 1964, was a place that not only demanded the end to racial injustice and poverty, but also sought to use leisure to build and reflect, to desire beauty and hunger for community and instill greater values.

Indeed, the *Yearbook* traced how conservation ideology had expanded to meet these new goals, problems and needs in society. At stake were broad "quality of life" issues that Department policies could bolster. With conservation programs that affected 81 percent of the nation's total land, the Department of Agriculture had a large role to play in achieving the goals of the Great Society. "Our conservation responsibilities require us to operate the world's largest outdoor playground," Freeman declared, referring to the nation's 186 million acres of public forest and grasslands. What began as

⁶¹ Ibid. This speech touched on many of the major issues of the time with the exception of civil rights. Johnson began the speech discussing national security and defense issues ("Today I worked and thought about problems in Viet Nam and the Dominican Republic") and one senses his relief in being able to talk about the importance of the natural world and beautifying America's cities—centerpieces of his Great Society. What those at the conference on natural beauty were doing was the same as what people were doing in Southeast Asia and other places. "Crisis and conflict command the headlines," Johnson said. "But it is your work that will shape the future" (41).

In its response to the White House Conference on Natural Beauty, the *New York Times* remarked in an editorial called "The American Environment," that "despite its unfortunate name, the White House Conference on Natural Beauty was, like the opening round of a battle, important in itself; but its true significance depends upon what follows." The conference was valuable because it helped to make visible "to the Johnson Administration, to the national press, to the public, and to the conference participants themselves—the range and complexity of the issues involved in what is becoming known as the 'new conservation.'" What was at stake was not beautification in any superficial sense, but "a proper approach to man's entire environment." If this country "is to have an environment fit for a rapidly growing population to work, play and live in, then there has to be recognition that there are higher values than private profit and bureaucratic convenience." Are "America's businessmen prepared to accept the social discipline needed to create a civilized environment for everyone?" asked the *Times*. "Are the members of Congress and administrators at all levels of Government prepared to discipline the relentless bureaucrats and their bulldozers?" These "are among the basic questions the American people have to face now and in the years just ahead." Fundamentally, "the 'new conservation' is about to emerge as a new dimension in national politics," the *Times* predicted. "Battles that have seemed parochial and diffuse are now being joined on a common national front. Last week's conference may some day be seen as a major step in the growing struggle to achieve a worthy environment for America" ("The American Environment," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1965).

a "program to protect the forests and the land," he stated in a speech unveiling *Outdoors USA*, "has now become a program to protect the quality of our way of living."⁶²

A *New York Times* review of the 1967 *Yearbook of Agriculture* highlighted the expansion of wise-use conservation ideology and adaptation of older land-use concepts for the pressing issues of the times. "But is this all that conservation means—'don't touch'?" the *Times* queried. "In the 20th century, it cannot. The population explosion with its need for more land, pollution of earth, sea and air, the yearning for green space as cities crowd closer together have forced broader interpretations of old land concepts."⁶³ These broader interpretations were detailed in the 1967 *Yearbook*.

For example, the *Yearbook* highlighted the importance of private lands conservation and multiple use toward achieving a more beautiful and balanced nation. "We help farmers divert land from unneeded crops to the development of soil, water, woodland, wildlife, and recreational resources." More than 30,000 farmers and ranchers now used parts of their land for income-producing recreation and other farmers received government payments for improving wildlife resources and permitting hunting, fishing and trapping on their land. "Since the strong surge of emphasis and interest in outdoor recreation began about 5 or 6 years ago, USDA has constantly accelerated its efforts toward helping meet national needs for recreation," wrote Lloyd E. Partain in the *Yearbook*.⁶⁴

⁶² Remarks by Secretary Freeman at the press premiere and reception of *Outdoors USA* at the National Wildlife Federation building, Washington, DC, 25 October 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c O.L. Freeman Oct. 67."

⁶³ "Conservation and the Land," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1967.

⁶⁴ Lloyd E. Partain, "Our Heritage—The Countryside," *Outdoors USA*, 396.

Since 1962, the Soil Conservation Service had helped 34,700 rural landowners and operators establish one or more income-producing recreation enterprises on their land to strengthen rural America. Through March 1967, the Farmers Home Administration had made recreation loans to 345 nonprofit rural associations totaling \$44 million and to roughly 550 farmers totaling \$4 million. The Cropland Adjustment Program had converted around 800,000 acres of farmland to public recreation uses, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service's Greenspan program provided grants to state and local governments to buy cropland for recreation, fish and wildlife purposes. The USDA and its cooperating State and local agencies were applying their scientific, technological and resource management principles to "broad area resource planning and development."

Indeed, planning for the countryside was planning for the entire nation; the USDA's expanding programs "insure a more rewarding countryside environment for both rural and urban people and preserve a great heritage." These initiatives would create a stronger rural America in the interest of the entire nation. Rural America "has adequate space for more people to live, work, and play; to perpetuate our heritage; and to assure a strong community and family life with gainful employment and wholesome leisure," Partain declared. The fate of the nation was tied to the fate of rural America: "The enduring strength of our society may well depend on the future development and use of America's countryside."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid, 397.

Certain policymakers, including Freeman, believed strongly in that statement and that the enduring strength of society did depend on the future conservation and wise use of America's countryside. The connections Partain made between rural America and the welfare of the rest of the nation, between an interconnected urban and rural space, articulated another major theme of the 1967 *Yearbook*: the remaking of America and the critical role rural America and conservation would play in that reform. The book explored the expansion of conservation ideology, the importance of recreation and beautifying the nation—all tenets of the “new conservation.” All of these developments pointed toward a broader, fundamental reform of society that leaders believed to be essential by the late 1960s.

Rural America, of which agriculture was now only a part, was the key to a balanced and prosperous America and central to the Great Society. Conservation measures were tools in a broad toolbox to remake America and achieve the good life. “Outdoors USA is indicative of the broad conservation functions of the Department of Agriculture. It is the latest salvo in our battle to rejuvenate and revitalize all of rural America for all our people,” Freeman wrote.⁶⁶ *Outdoors USA* was a book for all Americans, not just for farmers or rural dwellers, but for “citizens concerned about conservation of our natural resources, for hunters and fishermen, for family campers, for all who are concerned with the quality of the total environment, for children eager to learn about the outdoors, for farmers interested in profit-making recreation enterprises.”

⁶⁶ Remarks by Freeman, 3. John Baker echoed these sentiments in the *Yearbook* arguing, “properly developed, preserved, and managed, the countryside of our Nation can be improved. The waters of an unspoiled stream can be put to many tasks and yet the stream’s purity and beauty protected. It is the objective of the Agriculture Department’s programs.”

The Department of Agriculture was “moving forward with bold new actions to restore, conserve, and wisely use our natural heritage and maintain it for future generations.” It was the Department of Agriculture’s responsibility as one of the “major Federal land and water conservation agencies” and the “rural affairs department at the national level” to “preserve the priceless American heritage in the countryside that belongs to all the people,” declared Baker.⁶⁷

The *Yearbook* argued that conservation programs could help to build new “communities of tomorrow” and create a rural America that would be the site of America’s future communities. This message would form a central ideology of USDA efforts in the late 1960s. Secretary Freeman and others believed Americans were fundamentally living in the wrong places to the detriment of society: America was out of balance. While the world watched the race between superpowers to put a man on the moon, other policy leaders expressed concern about a different space—the physical space on the earth and how Americans used it. “Each year 3 million more Americans squeeze into our jam-packed cities,” wrote Freeman in the *Yearbook*’s foreword. “Today 140 million people—or 7 in every 10 Americans—are crowded onto just 1 percent of our land. The result is strangled cities, slapdash suburbs, and rush hour nightmares.” As Americans crowded and suffered in cities, rural America stood by, the answer to the nation’s woes: “But rural America has breathing space—room for people to live, to work, to enjoy recreation, to be part of the land.” Through conservation and appropriate

⁶⁷ John A. Baker, “The Outdoors Is for All of Us,” *Outdoors USA*, 1. “We have a priceless American heritage in the countryside that belongs to all the people, he wrote. “To assure that this great heritage is preserved, and denied to no one, is a primary responsibility of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—as the rural affairs department at the national level and as one of the major Federal land and water conservation agencies.”

development of natural and human resources, rural America could be “synonymous with good living” and the site of communities “where blight and urban sprawl will be unknown.”⁶⁸ This idealized, pro-rural stance formed a central part of the USDA’s call for national planning and a new type of American community in 1967 and 1968: the so-called “Communities of Tomorrow.” These communities were neither strictly urban, suburban, agricultural or rural, but communities that blended all of these types of living and transcended boundaries.

By the late 1960s, the USDA’s vision for conservation and reforming rural America had broadened, spurred by a sense of crisis and national imbalance. This sense of crisis and imbalance was felt all over the nation and for many reasons. Partly driving these late 1960s efforts were the unrest, violence and problems in America’s cities and a conviction on the part of policymakers, journalists, scholars and experts that lack of opportunity in rural America and the attendant rural migration to cities had caused the crisis in America’s cities. Also driving these efforts was a sense on the part of USDA leaders that rural America was not getting the attention it deserved in federal efforts and was being eclipsed by policies aimed at cities. An unbalanced American society was reaching a crisis point, USDA policymakers and other leaders argued, and the nation’s future rested upon the space, values, nature and potential that rural America offered. The fates of urban and rural America were fundamentally intertwined and all the components of rural America, including its agrarian heritage, economy, natural resources and beauty

⁶⁸ *Outdoors USA*, Foreword.

were essential to conserve, develop and reform for the sake of the nation and achieving the Great Society.

Chapter 4: Conservation and the Rural-Urban Imbalance Crisis

Introduction

This chapter explores what I term the “rural-urban imbalance crisis” that certain leaders, including Orville Freeman, President Johnson as well as scholars and journalists, saw developing during the mid to late 1960s. The crisis, according to these leaders, arose from too many Americans leaving rural communities and crowding into cities, causing unrest and deterioration. This rural outmigration was caused, they continued, by lack of opportunity in rural America, particularly as opportunities in agriculture declined. These leaders believed rural revitalization was a critical solution to the urban crisis. Within this context, as a general sense of crisis spread across the nation in the late 1960s, the conservation of rural America’s resources took on new urgency. Rural America, in its ability to help achieve the goals of the Great Society, which seemed to be slipping away before everyone’s eyes, suddenly became a beacon of hope.

Orville Freeman advocated for the expansion of the USDA’s purpose and purview to solve the rural-urban imbalance crisis. He sought to build on the Department’s innovative, reform-minded conservation programs and expand rural development initiatives. He also argued that the Department expand from focusing on farmers’ fields and rural communities to the creation of a brand new type of American community that would realize the benefits of both urban and rural America—idealized communities the USDA termed the Communities of Tomorrow. At the same time, Freeman became one of the strongest voices in the federal government to advocate for a national planning

policy by the late 1960s, which he thought was essential to solving the imbalance crisis and preventing the nation from going down a "suicide path."

One irony of the rural-urban imbalance crisis as conceived by these leaders, was that the USDA never linked its own farm programs to decline and economic stagnation in rural America—the very rural problems that were leading to the imbalance and urban crisis. Journalists made this connection—a reality that the *Wall Street Journal* called "Two Sides of the Farm Coin." Ultimately, rural conservation and development served as a way to innovate solutions within the context of commercial farm programs that, no matter how ineffective or wasteful, were not going away. This was a reality the Freeman administration accepted as it sought to reform America's landscape and communities and shape its future.

An Imbalanced America

In February 1968, President Johnson gave a special message to Congress, entitled, "Prosperity and Progress for the Farmer and Rural America." The speech covered a wide range of topics in agriculture and rural life and asked Congress to reauthorize the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act with the key changes discussed in Chapter three. Agricultural technology, combined with modern machinery, seeds and fertilizers had revolutionized production, Johnson acknowledged, but the American farmer still struggled to share fully in America's prosperity, and many rural communities had "been by-passed in the climb to abundance." Johnson offered a seven-point plan to bring new prosperity to rural America. Some of these points were specific, such as a

permanent extension of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1965 and the creation of a National Food Bank. Others were more vague, such as “aid and hope for the small farmer” and “continued revitalization of America’s rural heartland by improving men’s lives through decent housing, better jobs, and more rapid community development.”¹

Rural America had changed, Johnson observed in the speech. Commercial agriculture no longer defined it, and its problems were urban America’s problems. Thousands of men and women in rural America, farmers and not, suffered from low incomes and underemployment, and required help that commercial agriculture programs could not provide. What new job would open up for the 50 year old farmer who had spent his entire life working the soil, Johnson asked. What kind of future could a young farm boy aspire to when only one out of ten “can expect to earn a living as a full-time farmer?” Unprepared and untrained many “have left the land they know and streamed into the teeming slums of American cities.” The problem they pose “touches us all,” he remarked. “It is a problem of urban America no less than rural America.” Not just sentiment demanded that “we do more to help our farms and rural communities,” Johnson said. “The welfare of this nation demands it. And...I think the future of the cities of America demands it, too.”²

Making the countryside viable, and rural America prosperous, required a restoration of rural-urban balance. “Today 70 percent of our people live on 1 percent of our land. By the turn of the century—if present trends continue—there will be 240 million Americans living in urban areas occupying only 4 percent of this great and

¹ Lyndon Johnson, “Prosperity and Progress for the Farmer and Rural America,” 27 February 1968, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

² Ibid.

spacious nation," he remarked. To achieve this balance, and right the nation, Johnson addressed a number of initiatives, including expanding the food stamp program, rural electrification, and rural housing. Johnson called for expanded credit programs for rural firms, priority loans for the construction of industrial buildings in rural areas, planning, training and education services, community centers and improved housing.

He further recommended that Congress increase programs to assist rural communities build modern water and sewer systems and support comprehensive planning for groups of rural counties. For example, he asked Congress to authorize more recreation projects for Resource, Conservation and Development Areas (RC&D) authorized originally through the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act, and to appropriate funds for ten new multicounty, multi-purpose RC&D areas during fiscal year 1969. That would bring the RC&D areas to 51 total, encompassing 100 million acres.³

In this widening rural America, the small farmer still played a vital role, Johnson made sure to point out. To support the small farmer, Johnson proposed provisions to increase funds available to small farmers to begin new farm and non-farm enterprises and to provide credit to help the farmer convert his land into income producing recreation areas. These conservation efforts, and others, would help to build a stronger America, and allow people to choose where they wanted to live—they would not be forced to migrate to cities looking for work or better educations. The ability to choose where one wanted to live was a fundamental right that had been hard won over time. Now that freedom to choose was in jeopardy.

³ Ibid.

All of these efforts were critical, Johnson concluded, not just because of current problems, which were many, but also because America's heritage was being threatened as never before. Harkening to Thomas Jefferson, Johnson observed the nation's earliest destiny was shaped by those who labored the earth. Now the farmer and the rural community faced fundamental and forceful change at the hands of accelerating technology, and the government was obligated to assist those experiencing such change in order that those who labored on the land could once again shape the nation's destiny.⁴

On August 19, 1968, Johnson signed the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act Amendments, a bill that contained many of the proposals he had called for in February. The bill reflected "the changing conditions of life in rural America," Johnson remarked. The number of people needed to produce the nation's food and fiber on the nation's farms was declining, but the number of people who looked for jobs and homes in rural America was increasing and rural America had to provide them with opportunities. The bill represented the government's opportunity to "help people achieve the good life," filled with economic opportunity, wholesome and pleasant living conditions, and strong social and cultural institutions in small towns and other rural areas. The bill had passed both houses of Congress without a dissenting vote, demonstrating to Johnson that "the further development of the Nation's resources in its rural areas is strongly reaffirmed as a national goal." It was indeed a national goal, as leaders believed

⁴ Ibid.

improving rural America held promise for improving the quality of life for all Americans—urban, rural and otherwise.⁵

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By the mid 1960s, many leaders, including Secretary Freeman, had begun to connect the growing unrest, violence and other problems, such as congestion and crowding, in America's cities directly to the lack of opportunities in rural America and the resulting migration of rural people into cities. Despite vast efforts in the War on Poverty, a plethora of new government programs, and the passage of key civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965, many of America's cities and much of its countryside remained in need of help. On national television the urban crisis was unfolding. In August 1965, Los Angeles exploded in violence in what became known as the Watts Riots. At the core of the unrest were poverty, racial discrimination and inequality. The Watts riots were not the first urban riots of the 1960s, and they would not be the last.

A growing understanding developed in scholarly circles and among journalists in the 1960s that rural to urban migration had stressed America's cities. "Those not needed to produce our food and fibers have been emigrating to the great cities at an incredible rate," wrote *The Washington Post*. Some of this emigration had contributed to the vitality and growth responsible for urban development. But "some of it has added to the city slums millions of disenfranchised, disinherited and dispropertied people without

⁵ Lyndon Johnson, "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act Amendments," 19 August 1968, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

experience or training to fit them for urban living." Millions of these people would have been better off in their rural environments if employment could have been furnished there, the *Post* concluded.⁶

President Johnson himself, frustrated with the urban focus of the War on Poverty, created the president's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty in September, 1966, whose final report argued that because the nation had been oblivious of the rural poor, it had abetted both rural and urban poverty, "for the two are closely linked through migration."⁷ The Commission's report, *The People Left Behind*, issued in September 1967, chastised the nation for its obliviousness to the problems of the fourteen million Americans living in poverty in rural areas—a reality that constituted a "national disgrace" and the consequences of which "have swept into our cities, violently."⁸ Ultimately, hobbled by a lack of nationally known members (the only prominent politician on the panel was the chairman, Governor Edward T. Breathitt of Kentucky) and poor timing (the publication of its findings were overwhelmed by the escalation of the Vietnam War) the Commission did not receive the national attention it sought or deserved. Further adding to its low profile, while the Commission had been pursuing its work, Johnson's political rival, Robert F. Kennedy had taken up the cause of Hispanic migrant agricultural

⁶ "Rural America," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1965.

⁷ National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, *The People Left Behind: A Report by the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty* (Washington, DC: GPO, September 1967), "Introduction." Conservatives and liberals connected exploding welfare roles in cities to rural out-migration. On exploding welfare roles, their development in postwar society and a discussion of arguments for and against welfare, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (London: Tavistock Publications, Ltd., 1972). For more recent work, see Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸ The Commission contracted with dozens of scholars for research reports and provided a well-researched and thorough examination of the problems facing rural America. Scores of experts on diverse topics contributed.

workers, causing Johnson to distance himself from rural issues in 1967. Ironically, since Johnson had been frustrated by the national ignorance of rural problems, his distance contributed to the report's lack of attention and results.⁹

Freeman picked up the banner for rural America, arguing the federal government's programs, approaches and emphasis needed to change to address the nation's problems that stemmed from rural-urban imbalance.¹⁰ The Department of Agriculture needed to shift its orientation from agriculture to rural life as a whole and even change its name to reflect this shift. If rural America was to be a "viable part of our nation" it needed the full benefits of all federal programs. Freeman intended to "devote an increasing portion of [his] time to the task of rural development," because the problem of rural development was one of the most vital facing the nation. Poverty was the most severe in rural America and opportunities lagged most there. Furthermore, "there is a limit to the pressure we can put on our urban complexes" and that limit had clearly been reached. Using language that had a longstanding place in American life, he asserted: "The safety valve exists in rural America."¹¹ Once, the safety valve of rural American

⁹ Mark I. Gelfand, *The War on Poverty, 1964-1968, Part II: Records of the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, 1966-1967*, vii.

¹⁰ "Freeman Widens Agriculture Aim," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1964. "The role of the Department of Agriculture is being recast to gear it more closely to aiding all rural America and to increasing food production in underdeveloped nations...As Mr. Freeman envisions it, the concept would embrace the funneling of ideas and programs to rural America and would enlist the cooperation of other Federal agencies dealing with such programs as housing, town planning, problems of the aged, medical care and community services. Most federal programs, he said, are geared to urban areas and 'tend to stop at the city line.'" The *Times* also reported Freeman stating the Rural Areas Development program would be "broadened from the present concern with physical resources to concern with people."

¹¹ "Statement by Secretary Orville L. Freeman," Joint Meeting of Committees and Commissions on Food and Fiber and Rural Poverty, 15 November 1966, *Records of the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, 1966-1967*, The Presidential Documents Series, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. The concept of rural America as a "safety valve" had been around since the late 19th century when anxiety over the loss of the rural frontier caused many to wonder if America had lost its "safety valve." For a discussion of turn of the century frontier anxiety, see

was seen as the key to avoiding urban, industrialized America. Although it failed to prevent the creation of urban, industrial America, rural America still held the key to stabilizing it.

Indeed, the USDA's programs, goals and visions had expanded over the 1960s, both reflecting and influencing the changing landscape of rural and agricultural America and the emergence of a new rural America. As E. Winslow Turner, General Counsel to the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations and the U.S. Senate Committee on Government Operations, said to Farmers Home Administration employees in September 1968: "Ten years ago, the bulk of your programs went into loans for family farms. Today, over sixty percent of your programs go into non-farm development," including, soil and water conservation, water and waste disposal, recreation, anti-poverty agendas, small business development, and technical assistance. The FHA was no longer a simply functional agency with isolated responsibilities, but was now concerned with the "totality of rural environment."¹²

The Washington Post supported Freeman's call for institutional reform, declaring in November 1964 that Freeman had "lighted a hope that the focus of the department may broaden from commercial farming to rural life as a whole." If the Department of Agriculture were truly serious about a national policy to improve rural life, the whole orientation of the Department needed to shift. This was a much needed shift because the

David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993). Franklin Roosevelt also utilized the rural frontier-as-safety-valve language in his campaign for presidency in 1932, arguing that since the frontier had closed, government would have to become the next safety-valve, paving the way for his New Deal programs.

¹² Remarks by Winslow E. Turner, "Rural Reinvigoration—A Challenge for Creative Federalism," Portland, ME, 24 September 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-15, Folder, "VIB26(3)(b) Budget and Funds."

“appropriate focus for the Department is the people of all rural America who live in its smaller towns and rural communities whether or not they are directly engaged in agriculture.” Furthermore, the cities of the nation did not have “unlimited ability to absorb the great immigration from the countryside” as they were already overcrowded. This “sheer density of population,” the *Post* continued, “is being suspected as a cause of profound maladjustments in society.” Urban *and* rural renewal were both critical to making overcrowded cities livable. If an appropriate program of rural renewal were in place, “not all the immigration to the densely overcrowded cities would take place.” A great rural renewal program “to match the programs of urban renewal might solve some of the urban problems before they develop,” the *Post* argued optimistically. (As the urban crisis continued to unfold, the conversation became about how to control the damage, not prevent it).¹³

At the same time, more emphasis needed to be placed on small farmers and part-time farmers who “have an importance in our social structure all out of proportion to their contribution to commercial production.” These small and part-time farmers could not be overlooked by Department support and policy. In a nation as advanced and blessed with resources as the United States, it was now possible to move the elements of production to the places where people lived—and to the rural places where millions of them could live

¹³ Although it had been the case for some time, it was not until the 1960s that American leaders recognized and attempted to deal with the reality that a significant portion of the rural population and economy no longer engaged directly in agriculture. As Mark I. Gelfand points out in the “Scope and Content” overview of the National Advisory on Rural Poverty Commission records: “With regard to rural population and communities, particular attention was given to population and governmental changes in rural areas and the interrelationships between rural and urban America. Prior to 1960, rural population was defined as those engaged in agriculture. The 1960s saw a redefinition to include the nonagricultural complexion of rural areas” (x). The new contours of the nation included a rural America only partly based on agriculture, though agriculture remained vitally important, not only economically, but socially and culturally. True D. Morse had articulated the emergence of a “new” rural America in the late 1950s.

better than they could live in the cities. Farming and rural pursuits had societal meaning beyond pure economics that needed to be taken into account when forming policy and programs.¹⁴

It was time to ask, the *Post* admonished, "if we are a better, healthier, stronger and greater Nation for having 70 percent of our people in cities, with all their vast and unsolved problems."¹⁵ Ultimately, it did no good to just move human misery around from "one sink of degradation to another." Secretary Freeman was calling for a rural renaissance and that was "exactly what is going to be required." That renaissance might truly help the 2.5 million farmers outside the highest income group in commercial farming and other rural residents to succeed and to stay where they lived. No "enlightened" government could contemplate a policy of "inducing the disadvantaged and ill-prepared, by the naked coercion of want and poverty, to move into great urban centers which cannot provide the jobs for employable people already there and which cannot cope with the social problems of the unemployables already on their welfare roles."¹⁶

While calls for reform were plentiful, and optimistic, actually achieving positive change proved to be more difficult. Part of what made achieving rural renewal difficult were the difficulties rural Americans faced in organizing to apply for federal antipoverty funds out of the Office of Economic Opportunity, particularly compared to urban Americans. "Urban Bias in Washington?" queried the *Wall Street Journal*, citing

¹⁴ "Rural Renewal," *The Washington Post*, November 27, 1964.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Moving Misery Around," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 1965.

Freeman's frustration that while half of the nation's families with incomes under \$3000 lived in rural America, the countryside was seeing only five percent of the administration's anti-poverty funds. Particularly frustrating was the slow movement of funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity to rural areas for community action programs, which was related in large part, in Freeman's estimation, to the slow movement toward organizing in rural areas.

Indeed, part of the reason rural Americans had difficulty organizing was their scattered, far-flung and diverse nature. In contrast to the urban poor, the rural poor, "notably the white, are not well organized, and have few spokesmen for bringing the Nation's attention to their problems," asserted *The People Left Behind* report. Rural poverty, while "acute in the South," was not "limited" to black Americans, but permeated all regions of the nation and "all races and ethnic groups."¹⁷ And it certainly was not limited to farmers. The *Journal* further cited frustrations from "rural boosters in and out of Government" who felt that "OEO staff isn't giving applicants from 'hill and holler' precincts all the attention they deserve," when they actually did apply. The OEO firmly denied any suburban or urban bias, arguing that rural applications often took longer to process because of "omissions, errors or inadequately conceived plans."¹⁸

¹⁷ *The People Left Behind*, x. The Report pointed out that, "contrary to a common misconception, whites outnumber nonwhites among the rural poor by a wide margin. It is true, however, that an extremely high proportion of Negroes in the rural South and Indians on reservations are destitute."

¹⁸ "The Rural Poor: Depressed Farm Areas Trail Cities in Winning Poverty War Benefits," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 20, 1965.

Two Sides of the Farm Coin

While Freeman was plenty willing to address what he saw were inequities in federal funding and national attention toward the problems of rural America, to discuss the negative implications of rural to urban migration and the critical importance of conservation and rural renewal, the Department of Agriculture did not publicly link its commercial agriculture or research programs to the postwar rural-urban migration phenomenon, the industrialization of the countryside or rural decline. The Department and Congress were in fact supporting farms, to the tune of billions of dollars a year, but this support did not help the majority of farmers and rural dwellers, and these were the very people leaving rural areas and causing the crisis in the cities, as the rural-urban migration theory averred. One journalist did not hesitate to point out that when it came to supporting urban versus rural America over the past few decades, the federal government had spent nearly ten times more on farm programs than on urban housing and community development.¹⁹ Certainly, Department speeches acknowledged the "revolution" in agriculture that had occurred in the postwar years, the attendant surplus problem and the role technology played in displacing agricultural workers and livelihoods. But the Department did not publicly connect its support of agricultural technologies engineered to produce more out of fewer acres and with fewer people or its commodity programs to the decline of farmers, the decline of small farms and widespread loss of income in rural America.²⁰

¹⁹ Wolf Von Eckardt, "The Rural Roots of the Ghetto," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1967.

²⁰ As mentioned in chapter two, historian Shane Hamilton discusses how dry statistics can mask important causative forces, such as the "role of powerful government and business agents in fomenting the depopulation and industrialization of the postwar countryside, as if the process were the product of

The agricultural revolution was at once a miracle of progress and example to the world and a cause for disruption and sorrow for millions—the Department publicized both narratives.²¹ But the Department's role in each of those narratives was entirely separated. Politically, Freeman was committed to supporting administration policy on all fronts, even while, reflecting a longstanding tension within the USDA, these policies often worked at cross-purposes. The solutions he passionately campaigned for—new conservation and land-use measures and rural renewal, addressed the excesses of commercial agriculture and loss of jobs in rural America, and reflected the desire on the part of federal policymakers to shape a future for rural America that included thriving small farms. But these programs stopped short of reforming the commercial agricultural industry itself or the federal programs that supported it. They were intended to coexist with the more dominant model as much of postwar reform did. Indeed, while the postwar USDA conservation agenda sought an alternative vision of the countryside, it did not restructure the agribusiness model that caused such environmental and social distress.

The Kennedy administration did attempt to address the problems plaguing commercial agriculture in the early 1960s, namely surplus production, costly government programs and low product prices for farmers, through a stepped up supply control program designed by Freeman's top economic advisor, Willard Cochrane. Cochrane

inevitable technological forces or of the 'logic of industrial capitalism,'" (*Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008], 101).

²¹ So did others point out these dueling narratives in American postwar agriculture. Michael Harrington's, *The Other America*, focused national attention on rural poverty in America. During the previous three decades, mechanization had "re-created the American countryside," he observed. Certainly by some standards, "agriculture is one of the major successes of the affluent society." But 40 percent of all commercial farms—over one million farms—only accounted for seven percent of all sales. This was a major problem within the affluent society in his view. America of the fields had been replaced by the "other America," he declared. "What was once the nation's pride is now the nation's shame" (*The Other America: Poverty in the United States* [New York: Macmillan, 1962], 46, 41, 63).

argued his plan was merely a variation on production control programs that had been in place for decades that controlled the amount of land in production. He proposed that each farmer be issued a marketing certificate, or quota, that would allow him or her to sell a certain amount of each product. Each year a government agency would estimate what the demand for each agricultural commodity was likely to be at a fair price determined by Congress. Then farmers would be allowed to sell only that much. How to produce that amount would be totally left to the farmer, but production above that set amount would not be allowed.²²

This reform for a mandatory supply management program met with serious resistance both from farm country and Congress. In the charged context of the Cold War, certain farm publications accused Cochrane of being a Communist and argued the plan would implement "socialized farming." In particular, Bill Kennedy, the editor of *Farm and Ranch*, which served 1,140,000 subscriber families from sunbelt agriculture country, zealously attacked Cochrane and his ideas, providing key congressmen with advanced copies of his columns. "Socialized farming" he argued was even worse than "socialized medicine, Federal 'take charge' of public education, and sharp increases in Minimum Wage," all of which amounted to "pieces of legislation violating the American concept of government." In addition to these assaults from the farm press, certain members of Congress enjoyed the enormous power they had to fashion farm programs and worried the Cochrane plan would give the executive branch too much power. The only true version of the mandatory supply management program that survived Congressional

²² Richard A. Levins, *Willard Cochrane and the American Family Farm* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 55.

committee was a program for wheat written into the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act with the condition that it be approved by farmer referendum in 1963. On May 21, 1963, wheat farmers rejected a two-price plan involving compulsory acreage allotment and marketing quotas. It was a huge defeat for liberals and a success for the conservative Farm Bureau, which had campaigned extensively against the Kennedy administration agenda. The failure of this farm reform discouraged Cochrane and he resigned from his federal post in 1964.²³ Indeed, fundamental farm reform was not attempted again in the 1960s, and as this attempt demonstrated, farm program reform faced difficult odds in Congressional and farm country opposition.

Internally, Freeman worried the Department was gaining a reputation for only supporting top tier commercial producers. John Baker shared this concern, not just about the reputation, but the reality behind it. On November 27, 1967, John A. Baker sent what became known as the "Thanksgiving Day Memo" to Secretary Freeman, blasting certain department agencies, including the Soil Conservation Service, for focusing their resources on large commercial agriculture to the detriment of smaller family farms. As Assistant Secretary for Rural Development and Conservation, and as a former employee of the Farm Security Administration and National Farmers Union, Baker's perspective came as no surprise. "The American family farm system, as you have said in so many speeches," Baker wrote Freeman, "has been the production marvel of the world. I am convinced in my own mind that it is a source of political stability, desirable social values, and a bulwark of democracy." Large-scale farming and agribusiness threatened this

²³ Ibid, 56-60. "May 21, 1963, was the last day of serious mandatory supply control for grain in the twentieth century," writes Levins.

system. "We should not be hesitant or ashamed to stand up and fight toe to toe and eyeball to eyeball if necessary to help preserve it against the threatening inroads of factory farming on the one hand and non-farmer controlled vertical integration on the other."²⁴

The national press commented on the complex dynamics of power, control, equity and justice swirling around in the creation, development and implementation of federal agricultural and rural policy. Some journalists publicly connected certain of the Department's farm programs to decline in rural America and advocated that emphasis shift from supporting a successful large-scale agriculture to other rural programs. Farm legislation would no longer solve the problems of rural America, declared the *Washington Post* in November 1965. "We need an objective look not only at the economic problems related to farming but at the conditions of rural life."²⁵ Even though higher prices increased overall farm income in 1965 and would likely again in 1966, "there has been no change in the basic trend of agricultural development. The rich farm families are growing richer while the poor continue to migrate to the city slums." An adequate "program to reduce the rate of migration from poor farms to city slums by improving the quality of rural life has yet to be instituted." In light of the successes in commercial agriculture, the *Post* argued, "Congress should next turn its attention to the

²⁴ John A. Baker to Freeman, 24 November 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, John A. Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, "III Family Farm Programs." This memo sparked a written conversation between the head of the Soil Conservation Service, who had been hurt by Baker's assertion, and Baker.

²⁵ "Rural America," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1965.

changes that threaten to depopulate large areas of rural America and compound the problems with which the overcrowded cities are confronted.”²⁶

The Johnson Administration had finally confronted a major reality of the American farm situation—that there were “two sides to the farm coin, a fact that the Government up to now has largely ignored,” argued the *Wall Street Journal*. There was the “relatively prosperous upper one-third of the rural community, which gets most of the benefit from present price supports.” And then there were all the rest of the farmers, “who are either so small or so inefficient that they draw little help from current programs.” There was no question in the *Journal*’s mind that government had an obligation to aid these farmers, since their troubles stemmed in “considerable measure from the distortions created in the rural economy by past and present Federal programs.” By acknowledging that the farm coin had “two sides” and the rural division that this created, the administration had made a start toward a “realistic” approach to the farm economy.²⁷

But, the administration had taken no steps toward dismantling the price support systems or demonstrated a willingness to halt “pouring the taxpayer’s coin into profitless programs.” Attempts to control surplus, which the administration was focusing on instead, failed as they had before because farmers would idle their least productive acres. Furthermore, the *Journal* contended, production control proposals overlooked the fact

²⁶ “The Farm Outlook,” *The Washington Post*, November 29, 1965.

²⁷ “Two Sides of the Farm Coin,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 1965.

that the "present over-cultivation of farm land is largely a direct result of the price support system, which encourages everyone to cultivate as many acres as possible."²⁸

The only reason for the reluctance to dismantle price supports had to be politics, the *Journal* concluded, citing the big business that successful farming had become in the Midwest, because there was no "economic justification for continued coddling of this group and for the rest of the farmers the support system has long been a delusion." If the government truly wanted to help poorer farmers, then the agricultural industry needed to return to a free-market economy and the government needed to dismantle its costly and waste-producing system of price supports. This would free up a large amount of money for helping farmers who actually needed help. For one, the *Journal* continued, the private sector would take over much of the Department's current crop storage responsibilities and cost. The government could then target its resources where they were most needed—in supporting rural communities to supply off-farm jobs, setting up retraining and other educational programs and providing other job services.²⁹

The National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty also argued for a re-examination of farm programs. The Commission questioned the "consistency of spending large sums of public money on developing more farmland and at the same time holding millions of acres out of production." It also raised questions about a distribution of benefits that dispensed "millions to large scale farms while largely bypassing low income farmers." The programs seemed "excessively expensive in achieving our farm

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

production objectives” and often adversely affected the rural poor.³⁰ Many of the nation’s rural programs, especially farm and vocational agriculture programs were “relics from an earlier era.” They were developed during a time when the “welfare of farm families was equated with the well-being of rural communities and of all rural people.” This was no longer so. They were also developed without taking into account the consequences of vast technological change for rural people. Rural programs had not sufficiently adjusted to the fact that in a brief 15-year period, from 1950 to 1965, new machines and methods increased United States farm output by 45 percent and reduced farm employment by 45 percent. Many activities beyond farming and people beyond farmers were affected by these changes. A new rural America, and America at large, had indeed emerged.³¹

Land use adjustment in rural areas, using idle agricultural acres for other productive agrarian-based purposes, such as recreation, and the general conservation and development of natural resources to meet the needs of the new emerging rural America held promise, the Commission believed. Building on the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission findings, the Commission on Rural Poverty recommended “action to develop recreational facilities near our growing population centers” as a way to “provide employment to low income rural people.” The present rate of developing new recreational opportunities was too low considering the needs for such facilities were likely to triple during the next three decades. Overall, investments in water and other natural resources needed to be redirected to “stress the natural resource requirements for

³⁰ “Briefing Statement on Chapters 12 and 13,” *National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty Records*, 1.

³¹ *The People Left Behind*, ix.

developing both rural and urban areas.” Traditional conservation had to give way to “purposes more relevant to modern economic development.” In this way the Commission echoed “new conservation” objectives of adapting traditional conservation philosophy to newer circumstances and needs: utilizing private lands for new conservation needs; securing and developing new outdoor recreation areas, especially close to concentrations of population; controlling the waste products of technology; and preventing urbanization and growth from ravaging the land and people.³²

Throughout his tenure, Freeman supported the farm commodity programs and the perpetuation of the “two sides of the farm coin,” repeatedly arguing commercial farm programs played an important role and were meant to balance supply and demand, not fix small farm problems. He also vociferously supported new conservation and rural development measures as solutions to those small farm problems, as well as to the problems arising from rural-urban imbalance. The tensions between these programs and agendas were not resolved and continued to play out on the land, the values they promoted often colliding.

Ultimately, many of the nation’s thorniest problems were the result of a “folly” of “stacking up ‘three quarters of our people in the steel and concrete storage bins of the city—while a figurative handful of our fellow citizens rattle around in a great barn full of untapped resource and empty dreams,” Freeman argued in October 1966. Freeman denied he was proposing a “back-to-the-farm” movement, but that he was instead urging improved economic and educational opportunities in rural areas to counteract the pull of

³² “Briefing Statement,” 1.

the cities. The Department of Agriculture was making an intensive effort to help farm and rural people to develop new conservation land-use measures, by offering financial and technical assistance for projects like riding stables, fish preserves and vacation farms. By the mid-1960s those efforts had become part of a broader vision to help balance an increasingly unsteady nation.³³ This vision included a plan to restructure America's communities around a rural base—communities the Department of Agriculture called the Communities of Tomorrow.

Concocting a Cure: From Farmers' Fields to the Communities of Tomorrow

In the summer and fall of 1967, the USDA rolled out its Agriculture 2000 vision, which included a plan to shape new, enlightened places for Americans to live called the Communities of Tomorrow. The program, "Agriculture 2000," looked ahead to the year 2000 and set six major missions for the Department of Agriculture: Income and Abundance; Communities of Tomorrow; Resources in Action; Growing Nations—New Markets; Science in the Service of Man; and Knowledge for Living. These missions sought to increase the quality of living for farm people, rebuild rural communities and reverse the trend of "forced" or "aimless" migration from farm to city.³⁴

³³ "Halt on Flight to City Urged by Freeman," *The Washington Post*, October 12, 1966.

³⁴ "Agriculture 2000," 7 July 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Box 1.4/77, Folder, "XIB2c(2(a Ass't Sec'ys Jun-Aug 67)." In addition to the vision of the Communities of Tomorrow—a countryside "dotted by new towns and growing rural communities where the benefits of community life are matched by the rich beauty of the countryside," an agriculture fully sharing in national prosperity, urban centers free of smog and blight, new industries dotting rural America and providing the necessary "economic underpinnings" for the "good life in the country"—the Department also envisioned certain technological and scientific developments. These included agricultural space satellites that would "supply the basic intelligence for agriculture;" biological and chemical controls that would have eliminated the majority of insects that caused agricultural damage (including flies and mosquitoes); livestock kept in "environmentally controlled shelters and produced for market in a third less time and on a third less feed,";

The Department of Agriculture under Johnson framed its Agriculture 2000 agenda in contrast to the way the Department had run programs prior to 1961, which, it argued, had been primarily farm commodity oriented. In the late 1950s, "lack of insight" prevented the Department from coming to grips with major trends and problems in rural American life. These were namely the technological revolution in agriculture, the attendant exodus from farm to city and the resulting economic and social decay in rural America over the 1950s. In "cold truth," stated Freeman, "there were, are and will continue to be fewer and fewer opportunities" for people in traditional farming. But, in order to stem and ideally reverse the rural-urban tide, "attractive nonmetropolitan alternatives to life in today's cities" had to be crafted. In 1961, this reality had become readily apparent and the federal Department of Agriculture had responded by expanding its purpose and horizon from "the farmers' fields to include all of nonmetropolitan America."³⁵

The struggle to revitalize rural America and make it an attractive alternative to urban centers had been joined, Freeman asserted, by others as the need for both rural and urban redevelopment and revitalization was now widely recognized. Between 1960 and 1968, the USDA had undergone aggressive activity to support its rural American initiatives, including an increase in loans and expenditures for agriculture by 27 percent and an increase for other rural revitalization efforts by 159 percent. Central to these

computer-controlled machines that planted the crops, fertilized by prescription, determined when produce was ready for market, harvested on order, and graded and packaged the commodities for delivery by "supersonic cargo planes to fully automated warehouses." In addition, houses would have movable partitions that could be added or removed as the size of families changed and refrigerators would contain "such advanced foods as instant sandwich mixes and frozen lettuce and salad mix."

³⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Communities of Tomorrow," within "Struggles and Achievements Ahead," NAL, USDA History Files, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2) Freeman Oct. '68-."

efforts were the more than 3000 Technical Action Panels, or TAPs, run by the Farmers Home Administration in every county and multi-county region in America. The TAPs, comprised of USDA representatives and appropriate representatives of other federal agencies, were established in 1961 to provide for the planning and implementation of rural projects and programs. They were designed to coordinate the work of the USDA, provide a channel for rural outreach, and support the local Rural Areas Development committees and Extension Service.³⁶

The potential of all these efforts could be seen only "vaguely," even after seven years of hard work. One major mark of success could be found in the falling number of rural people migrating to cities. Net domestic migration to metropolitan areas had fallen from around 670,000 annually during the 1950s to around 216,000 per year in the first five years of the 1960s according to USDA statistics. Indeed, this trend and the slowing growth of metropolitan centers were both touted (and claimed) by the USDA as signs of progress.³⁷ The success of balancing rural and urban America also depended on other

³⁶ Memorandum, "Stewardship of Technical Action Panel Chairmanship," from the Farmers Home Administration to John A. Baker, 9 August 1966, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, "IVD2b Appraisals of TAP." The TAP's assisted in a number of areas of federal work, including efforts to enroll the rural elderly for Medicare benefits, food distribution programs for the needy, helping to implement programs enhancing natural beauty in rural areas, land and water conservation, and manpower development. The types of projects undertaken by TAP's included recreational facilities, livestock marketing, mosquito control, school dropouts, comprehensive planning, vacation farms, feed processing facilities, tourist promotion, ski resorts, strawberry production, swimming pools, soil testing and fertilizing programs, housing and many other projects. "Technical Action Panels have been charged with the responsibility of making maximum utilization of all the programs available in the Department and other agencies to assist the rural needy," wrote the Farmers Home Administration in 1966. Still, at the heart of rural revitalization and reform stood the family farm and a strong agriculture: "In all instances," the FHA added, "efforts are made to strengthen the family farm and to develop projects that are consistent with the Department's family farm policy."

³⁷ USDA press release, "Town and Country, USA," 28 December 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/Box 74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman Dec. 67)." The growth of metropolitan areas was slowing, the press release reported, while rural and non-metro areas were increasing. During the 1950s, according to USDA statistics, metropolitan areas

federal efforts, including expanded provisions of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 for community development, housing and comprehensive planning.³⁸

The Communities of Tomorrow's mission was "to revitalize rural America and restore rural-urban balance." For too many years too many people had crowded themselves into central cities—"people attracted by the hope, often the illusion, of greater opportunity." As a result, America's cities were exploding with violence, while many villages and small towns were drained of people and economic vigor. The solution to "this imbalance of people and opportunity" was a "new type of community, neither urban nor rural, but possessed with the highest values of both; a functional multicounty Community of Tomorrow that blends the economic and cultural opportunities of affluent metropolitan life with the space and beauty of the countryside." These Communities of Tomorrow would make possible in both the city and the countryside a quality of civilization that fully reflected man's aspirations and inventiveness. The Department of Agriculture intended to help people build those communities in the effort to "remove the

grew by 2.4 percent a year, and this growth slowed to 1.7 percent a year between 1960 and 1965. The migration to cities had not been "halted," the press release reported, but a "great reduction" had occurred.

In 1971, Calvin Beale, chief demographer of the USDA Economic Research Service concluded that the net rural population loss in the 1950s had been 6.5 million and had slowed to 2.4 million in the 1960s. Further, if people leaving farms were subtracted from the total, the nonfarm-nonmetropolitan population actually rose by 19 percent in the 1960s. The "heavy decline of farm people has masked from public notice the rapid growth of the nonfarm segment of the rural and small city population," he concluded. The biggest turnaround from loss to gain was in 500 rural counties mostly in the upper South. This gain was offset, however, by migrations out of the northern great plains, a trend that "aroused little concern" at that point because those migrants "are socially invisible and are deemed desirable workers and citizens." One consequence, Beale concluded, was that it was possible to get urban political support to help keep people from leaving the South, but that the "Plains and Corn Belt outmovement is not generally associated with poverty or ethnic minorities and does not generate much outside concern." Quoted in Dennis Roth, "The Nixon Administration Through Passage of the Rural Development Act of 1972," *Federal Rural Development Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2002), 3. Roth, or possibly Beale (hard to tell) makes the very interesting point that for the first time in American history in 1970, the population of many rural counties had shifted from "predominantly farm to predominantly nonfarm" (3).

³⁸ "Communities of Tomorrow," 4.

scars of collision between man and his environment” and to avert further collisions that were inevitable if the nation continued on its current course.³⁹

The Department imagined the Communities of Tomorrow in this way: an American landscape dotted with communities that included a blend of renewed small cities, new towns and growing rural villages. Each cluster had its own jobs and industries, its own college or university, its own medical center, cultural entertainment and recreational centers and a prosperous agriculture. Hundreds of such communities would make it possible for 300 million Americans in the future to “live in less congestion than 200 million today” and would enable urban centers to become free of smog, blight and overcrowding with ample parkland in easy reach for all. This was not a dream world, but a world that could be built if the American people were willing to work for it.

The Communities of Tomorrow would share certain characteristics. First, they would extend over several counties. Second, they would be “natural” in geographic structure, that is, each of their components would be bound together by roads, rivers and other physical and natural resource features that “enable it to be a dynamic and fully functioning economic, social, and cultural unit.” How would these new communities differ from the “troubled big cities of today?” They would use space as an asset for a better life. The entire concept was designed to help Americans enjoy the benefits of a vigorous and healthy countryside and the benefits of stimulating metropolitan life.⁴⁰

³⁹ “Communities of Tomorrow: Agriculture/2000,” November 1967, USDA, NAL, USDA History Collection, Section XI, Series 1, Subseries 4, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, “XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman Nov 67.”

⁴⁰ Ibid, 7.

Conservation and recreational development represented a key way to achieve this broader vision of a more healthy and sustainable America.⁴¹ It was USDA policy to “assure balance in outdoor recreation through comprehensive planning;” to provide technical and financial help that stimulated development of privately owned recreation for profit; to provide technical and financial assistance for the development of public recreational facilities in rural communities; to encourage public hunting, fishing and hiking on lands where farmers used federal funds to make land use adjustments or install conservation measures; and to emphasize natural beauty, among other policies.

In December 1967, the Department of Agriculture co-hosted a symposium on the Communities of Tomorrow with the Secretaries of Housing and Urban Development; Health, Education and Welfare; Labor; Transportation; and Commerce. The symposium, which also included planners, sociologists, economists and other experts, marked a “first infant step toward charting national course for our people and their land.”⁴² It was an appropriate measure, the *Washington Post* concluded in August 1967. The origins of the violence of the recent weeks had its roots in the past fifty years, when millions of young men in rural America were uprooted by World War I. They began the “the 50-year march to the cities”—a “great migration” to which the nation had given far too little thought.⁴³

⁴¹ To support the development of the Communities of Tomorrow concept, the Department of Agriculture cited programs and policies in twelve areas: farming and ranching, business and industry, community facilities, elimination of poverty, education and job training, housing, outdoor recreation and natural beauty, natural resource conservation and development, health and welfare, food, and transportation.

⁴² Eric Wentworth, “Freeman Concocts a Cure: Agriculture Secretary Links City Problems With Those of Country Cousins,” *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1967.

⁴³ “Demographic Collision,” *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1967.

The looming specter of Americans crowded into "five vast strip cities" with "an airless, waterless, joyless—and perhaps hopeless—existence" by the year 2000 had spurred the creation of the symposium and the Communities of Tomorrow reform vision. Freeman was already committed, the *Post* noted, to an urban-rural balance that would save the cities from destroying themselves. A high investment priority in building up opportunity in rural America was required, though the *Post* did not see that as the chief significance of what Freeman said. Rather, the chief significance was found in his call for a change of national direction. If this change of direction were not enacted, this rich, resourceful and powerful country would "strangle itself on its own congestion." The warning signals that had been sounded in one large city after another "should set the whole country to thinking about ways and means of getting off this collision course with our environment."⁴⁴ Indeed, this notion of balance and enlightened communities built on developing ideals of environmentalism—harmonious human communities interwoven with the land and the wider environment, instead of in explosive tension with it that threatened all life on earth.

Another journalist suggested that, as the Secretary of Agriculture, Freeman might have a personal interest in making rural America the solution to urban woes. Among the "physicians prescribing salves, ointments, lotions or pills to ease America's outbreak of angry urban sores is Orville L. Freeman, the irrepressible Secretary of Agriculture," wrote Eric Wentworth in August 1967. Freeman was, "by the nature of his job," a "specialist and seeks equal billing for his specialty in whatever treatments are

⁴⁴ Ibid.

undertaken." Probably the main cause of the country-to-city migration was lack of opportunity in rural America, both for those who had jobs and those who found their jobs unrewarding. Not only the rural poor were leaving, but even "better-off young people" who could be potential community leaders were joining the "parade" to the cities. Farming's technological revolution, which Wentworth pointed out, the federal government had helped to foster, forced millions off the land. The tide to cities could not be reversed, in Wentworth's estimation, but if Freeman had his way it could at least be slowed. Freeman's prescription included the development of a "national policy of urban-rural balance," a vague concept at best, but which stressed setting a higher priority on government investments in rural areas to improve public services and facilities, to help create more jobs and generally make the countryside a more "inviting alternative to city life."⁴⁵

While Freeman repeatedly called attention to the needs of rural people, and admittedly was sometimes criticized for not doing more, part of the reason rural America did not get enough attention, in Wentworth's analysis, was that it was gradually losing whatever political clout it once had on Capitol Hill. Indeed, the demographic shift to metropolitan areas meant not only more resources would be directed there, but also resulted in increased political power to urban areas. Further eroding rural America's political clout were two Supreme Court cases in 1964 that decided "one man, one vote," tying Congressional representation and electoral votes to population rather than

⁴⁵ Wentworth, "Freeman Concocts a Cure."

geography and triggering redistricting.⁴⁶ Certainly Congress continued to support the business of farming through its farm legislation, but this was clearly no longer the same thing as supporting rural Americans as many had pointed out. Thirty percent of Americans lived in rural areas in 1967. In 1960, farmers represented just 8.3 percent of the population, a number that had fallen from 12.2 percent in 1950 and which would fall to 4.4 percent by 1970.⁴⁷

The theme of rural-urban balance at the heart of the Communities of Tomorrow symposium, was indeed a crucial one, journalist Wolf Von Eckardt admitted, but was by no means a new or solely American issue. Concerns about concentrations in cities had

⁴⁶ These cases were *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. (1) 1964 and *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533, 1964.

⁴⁷ "Historical Timeline," *Growing a Nation*. In 1950, the total U.S. population was 151,132,000; farm population was 25,058,000, the number of farms was 5,388,000 and the average farm acreage 216. In 1960, the total U.S. population was 180,007,000; farm population: 15,635,000; number of farms: 3,711,000, average acres: 303. In 1970, the U.S. population was 204,335,000; farm population: 9,712,000; number of farms: 2,780,000; average acres: 390. In 1980 (the trends continue), the total U.S. population was 227,020,000; farm population: 6,051,000; farmers 3.4 percent of the population; number of farms: 2,439,510; average farm acres: 426. By 1990, farmers represented just 2.6 percent of the population; total U.S. population: 261,423,000; farm population: 2,987,552; number of farms: 2,143,150; average acres: 461. The USDA listed a "farm entrepreneurial population in 1991 as 5,024,000, however and by 1998 the number of farms had risen slightly to 2.19 million and the average acres per farm declined slightly to 435.

The 2007 Census of Agriculture identified a four percent increase in farms in the U.S. from 2002. Eleven states (OR, NE, OH, TN, GA, NY, KY, VA, NC, SD and MS) saw declines in the number of farms, but 39 states saw an increase in farm numbers. WA, MT, WY, CO, AZ, NM, UT, TX, LA, AL, FL, SC, WV, PA, AK, HI, and all of the New England states saw an increase of 5.1 percent or higher in farms. The Census saw a continued trend (since World War II) towards more small and very large farms. The 291,329 "new farms" that began operation since 2002 ended to be smaller and have lower sales than all farms nationwide. They averaged 201 acres and \$71,000 in sales compared to the average acreage for all farms in the U.S.: 418 acres and \$135,000 in sales. Thirty-three percent of new farm operators reported farming as their primary occupation (ie, more of them had a different "primary" occupation) compared to the average of all farm operators listing farming as a primary occupation: 45 percent. This increase in small farm operation likely reflects the renewed interest in small-scale agriculture and the local and sustainable agriculture movement of the 2000s. At the same time that new farms came onto the scene between 2002 and 2007, the general trend toward concentration of production of agriculture that has occurred throughout the 20th century (and which accelerated after WWII) continued. In 2002, 144,000 farms produced 75 percent of the value of U.S. agricultural production. In 2007 the number of farms producing that same share dropped to 125,000. In 2002, farms with more than \$1 million in sales produced 47 percent of all production. In 2007, farms in this sales class produced 59 percent of all production. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, *2007 Census of Agriculture* [Washington, DC: National Agricultural Statistics Service], "Farm Numbers").

been present since the founding of the United States, and took on urgency at the turn of the twentieth century as industrialization accelerated across many nations, spurring the original conservation movement among other Progressive reforms. Concerns about the loss of the rural frontier pervaded the United States in the late 19th century, and the fear of a declining rural life spurred the turn of the century American Country Life Movement and Theodore Roosevelt's 1908 Country Life Commission. In 1898, London court stenographer Ebenezer Howard called the streaming into overcrowded cities one of the most pressing problems of the day and devised a solution to such problems. His solution was the creation of "Garden Cities," which became "New Towns" in modern England, defined by Howard as a "joyous union of town and country" from which "will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization." Freeman's description of the Communities of Tomorrow sounded almost exactly the same, Eckardt noted—a new type of multi-county community, neither rural nor urban but a blend of the economic and cultural opportunities of affluent metropolitan life with the beauty and space of the countryside.⁴⁸

Attendees to the symposium did not dispute that New Towns or Communities of Tomorrow would raise standards of living in rural America, provide improved housing and job opportunities for those desiring to leave the inner city and arrest urban sprawl. But there was no agreement on a national growth policy. This non-agreement existed for

⁴⁸ Wolf Von Eckardt, "The Rural Roots of the Ghetto," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1967. Eckardt took a critical view of the Communities of Tomorrow symposium. Ultimately, in Eckardt's estimation, the "exalted symposium" to discuss the future balance of the nation and whether or not it was inevitable that by the year 2000 100 million more people would pile into a space that already held 140 million made "hardly a stir" even with Vice President Hubert Humphrey's call for a "New Towns" act. The lack of reaction caused him to question if the vice president, in the "current inflation of symposia, confrontations, convocations, conventions, assemblies, meetings, commissions, promises and proposals on the urban crisis" had used up his credibility. The "illustrious" leaders of "what was once called the Great Society" (minus Stewart Udall, a major oversight in Eckardt's opinion) gathered at the symposia in the effort to solve problems might have instead "added further fuel to the tinder of unmet and ever rising expectations."

many reasons, including America's political culture. Sociologist Philip M. Hauser pointed out that "planning" was "still a dirty word in America except, perhaps, when it is prefixed with the word 'city'." A representative from England advised U.S. leaders not to kid themselves: America was going to spend billions on housing no matter what. More people would be born, the economy would continue to grow and demands for goods and services would only increase. The real question was not whether the money was going to be spent, but how, on what kinds of communities and development. It was a question of budgeting abundance responsibly, with a view to the future and with a view to the most crying social needs. The issue, she asserted, was really about whether to spend on "a more balanced pattern or allowing the splurge to go on." One of the ways that hope returned to people, she offered, was giving people a threshold in time "in which they can believe and therefore begin to see change." That was perhaps the greatest challenge for the six cabinet members hosting the symposium—how to "find ways for hope to come back."⁴⁹

At the end of the day, Freeman did not envision a society that supported only a tiny number of people on a vast amount of land. While food production was critical for any society's survival, the broader "quality of life" natural resources, and heritage of rural America also offered critical components of any healthy society. Furthermore, people deserved the freedom to choose where they wanted to live. For these reasons, the Communities of Tomorrow emerged as a way to reform American communities, pour resources into rural areas, stimulate small-scale agriculture, and shift the orientation of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the Department of Agriculture to become more of a department of rural affairs that was fundamentally concerned with suburban and urban America as well.

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The Communities of Tomorrow vision built on a longstanding tension between rural and urban life in America, and reflected problems other industrialized nations had confronted.⁵⁰ Perhaps most directly in the United States, it recalled the 1930s Department of Agriculture New Deal programs to build planned, model suburban communities outside of America's cities and to create new and improved rural communities based upon better land use and resource conservation practices. The Communities of Tomorrow and New Deal greenbelt and rural community programs never achieved all that their creators envisioned. With the exception of Columbia, Maryland, a privately-funded planned "new city" designed by developer James W. Rouse, which aspired to many of the Community of Tomorrow goals, the Communities of Tomorrow never developed in a centrally planned manner. Yet, while the Communities of Tomorrow vision never materialized in a concerted way, Department of Agriculture conservation and rural development programs and policies, in conjunction

⁵⁰ To demonstrate some of these continuities, the farm recreation program could have taken a page out of the turn of the twentieth century Boy Scouts of America handbook. As Roderick Nash recounts in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), the Handbook lamented that a century before every boy had lived close to nature, but since then the country had "undergone an 'unfortunate change' marked by industrialization and the 'growth of immense cities.'" The Handbook proposed that the nation's boys lead their country back to an emphasis on "Outdoor Life" (148). The fear of a loss of nature and nostalgia toward the outdoors took on new dimensions with each generation, but many of the basic feelings remained the same.

with other federal efforts in the 1960s, did implement various components of this idealized vision of America's future.

The regional planning required for the Resource Conservation & Development areas, for example, implemented parts of the Communities of Tomorrow vision. Freeman had long supported the concept of multi-county and regional planning units, and Congress had authorized them with the creation of the Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) areas in the 1962 Food and Agriculture Act. During the summer of 1967, Freeman embarked on a tour to visit rural conservation and development programs in action and to highlight accomplishments of RC&D areas. This tour to four states—Mississippi, Alabama, Iowa and Indiana—allowed federal department officials to witness problems and progress.⁵¹ The Department also hoped to focus attention on gains rural Americans were making toward “developing Communities of Tomorrow.”⁵²

⁵¹ Press Release, Secretary Freeman Announces ‘Look and Listen Tour,’” 20 June 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda: John A. Baker Files, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, “IVD1d(1) Secretary’s Tours.”

⁵² Draft for Mississippi Tour, 1 March 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda: Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, “IVD1d(6) Secretary’s Tours.” The actual tour took place on June 26, 1967 and the Secretary visited Alabama the next day. The goal of the trip to Mississippi, according to a press release, was to review anti-poverty projects ranging from manpower training to the Headstart program to housing. The Secretary also wanted to see firsthand the “impact of mechanization and technology on farm workers and tenants” and to find out how “small cities are working with people in the surrounding towns and countryside on community development projects that can revitalize the economy.” In Mississippi, he visited the Delta and Pine Land Company plantation, 14 miles south of Greenville, Mississippi. Fifteen years before, the 30,000 acre farm had been farmed by sharecroppers raising cotton. Since that time the enterprise had switched to a highly mechanized farming program with heavy capital investment, but more diversified farming. At the time of Freeman’s visit, the farm planted 6300 acres of cotton, 6300 acres of soybeans, 1600 acres of rice, 1200 acres of wheat, 200 acres of corn and 30 acres of cucumbers and tomatoes. Two thousand five hundred hereford beef cattle grazed the grassland on the levees along the Mississippi River. Three hundred and forty families lived on the “plantation” so they called it, 280 of them black. Management provided the families with housing and recreational facilities.

Freeman also visited the Mound Bayou Recreation and Conservation League, formed by families in the area who had borrowed \$114,000 from the FHA to purchase 81 acres of land to build a lake, community building, boat dock, picnic area, car parking area and house. The lake, not yet completed,

In Iowa, Freeman visited TENCO—a ten county area involved in economic planning motivated by serious concerns stemming from social and economic change in the area. The initiative for TENCO came from the Extension Service at Iowa State University. Fifty local men and women had designed four areas of focus for the region: agriculture, education, industry and recreation. When Freeman arrived, local 4-H members greeted him with signs that said: “Welcome to TENCO, the land of recreation and history.”⁵³

The Earl “Hank” Strickler Farm and Welding business lay within TENCO. Strickler owned 72 acres and rented an additional 135 acres for corn and ten dairy cows. In 1965 he had obtained a Farmers Home Administration loan for \$2500 to establish a welding business. Even though he was still considered as living in poverty, he believed he was making progress and planned to develop a woodland area and farm pond for recreational purposes. Freeman also visited the Wayne L. Sample farm and Camping Grounds, comprised of 281 acres, 40 in cropland and much of the rest in timber. In 1962, Mr. and Mrs. Sample applied to the Farmers Home Administration for a \$23,500 loan to develop a recreation enterprise. With the assistance of the Soil Conservation Service, Sample developed a recreation plan for 80 trailers and routinely invited local groups to use his grounds for various outdoor recreation activities, including picnics, trap

would be 60 acres and stocked with bass and bream under the supervision of the Soil Conservation Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. The community estimated 3000 people would use the facilities.

⁵³ Records of the Secretary’s 1967 rural development tour, the “Look and Listen Tour,” NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-6, Folder, “IVD1d(6) Secretary’s Tours.”

shootings, coon dog training and fishing. He did note, however, that he had been forced to sell a group of saddle horses because of high insurance costs.⁵⁴

Department officials also visited the nation's first RC&D project in Indiana, where the USDA was actively working with local leaders to establish public and private recreation areas, and to carry out other projects to rebuild the economy. Approved in May 1963, the Lincoln Hills RC&D project encompassed one million acres and spanned four southern Indiana counties: Spencer, Perry, Crawford and Harrison. Lincoln Hills represented a good example of the multi-county approach to overcome economic decline in rural areas and the importance of local leadership. Local leaders had developed extensive plans to develop recreation areas, both public and private, and to develop sites for industrial development and rural water and sanitary systems. The local leadership had also sought to develop processing and marketing facilities for locally raised livestock and crops. The largest city in the four-county area, Tell City, of 8000 people, had experienced population decline and out-migration, but the population was rising again.⁵⁵

While there, Freeman dedicated the Saddle Lake Recreation Area, located near Gatchel, Indiana in the Hoosier National Forest, part of a Soil Conservation Service small watershed project. Saddle Lake provided an example of how critically linked policymakers believed conservation, natural beauty and rural stimulation to be. The lake was the first of four flood prevention and recreation structures to be built in the flood prevention area. Job Corpsmen from the Branchville Job Corps Center had installed recreation facilities around the lake for camping, swimming, picnicking and boating. The

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

land in this RC&D area was gently sloping and heavily wooded. Even though the entire area was implementing a comprehensive rural development agenda, it was the resource of natural beauty that the people of southern Indiana were betting on heavily to boost their economy through tourism and recreation.⁵⁶ Highlighting the importance of conservation for recreation, John A. Baker stated that summer: a “dynamic recreation program” was not possible without a “dynamic resource conservation program overall.”⁵⁷ Recreation occupied a central place in the overall conservation package to improve “man’s total environment”—a package that also included flood control, soil erosion prevention, abatement of stream pollution and forest management.

A year later, in August 1968, Freeman resumed the tour in his home state of Minnesota with a strong message about the need for innovative and proper natural resource use. He articulated the need for comprehensive planning and to properly “use the space of America for the people of America.” Fundamentally, Freeman believed, the nation was coming to understand that rural and urban problems were two sides of the same coin. Congestion, pollution, discord in the cities and dwindling opportunity and decay in the countryside comprised two parts of one problem: the need to match the abundant space in the nation to the growing numbers of people and the need to create cultural and economic opportunity in the countryside.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Address by John A. Baker before the Federal Assistance Institute, National Recreation and Park Association, 18 July 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, “XIB2c(2(a Ass’t Sec’y’s Jun-Aug 67.”

⁵⁸ Secretary Freeman’s Statement on the Minnesota Rural Development tour, 11-12 August 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, “XIB2c(2 O. L. Freeman July-Oct 68.”

Nothing was more important to the future of the nation than balanced growth both in the countryside and between the big cities and "countryside USA." Various projects going on at that time in Minnesota, including a canoe trail, an alfalfa drying plant and new living quarters for senior citizens, were testimony, Freeman believed, to the creative leadership of dynamic local people using government tools to make their particular communities better places to live. They were also testimony to the realization that the massive migration to cities that climaxed after World War II had to be halted if the 300 million people expected to live in America by the year 2000 were able to live in harmony with each other and with their natural environment.⁵⁹

In this technological age, Americans could no longer afford the luxury of accidental progress, Freeman asserted. Local leaders needed to expand their vision from their own towns and counties to their broader region's possibilities as a "unified, interdependent whole"—one community of farms, small towns and small cities with resources, both human and material, far beyond what each could muster alone. Thirty states had implemented such multi-planning districts and the concept was advancing nationally. And it truly needed to be a national effort to be successful. "Until we can generate a total, national effort for rural-urban balance—a creative, imaginative effort involving all the people of town, country and city and their governments, we will not be able to do it," Freeman concluded.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

A Growing Sense of National Crisis

What began in the early 1960s as a discussion about the conservation of rural America's natural resources and the distinct problems it could address in American society took on a tone of crisis by the end of 1967. Freeman saw a "worsening situation that threatens the very foundation of American life and institutions. I refer to the suicide road we have been traveling for the last 20 years as we have dumped 20 million Americans into great cities from the countryside." If this trend were permitted to continue, if "we fail to use space in the countryside to make a place for the 100 million more people, at a minimum, who will inhabit this nation by the year 2000, we will be committing national suicide."⁶¹

This situation, asserted Freeman, constituted the nation's greatest challenge and greatest threat. America was sitting on a "timebomb of imbalance." The technological revolution in agriculture had triggered an exodus that had produced economic and social decay, such that what the nation had to offer to the 100 new million Americans in the year 2000 was "a decaying countryside or an exploding city."⁶² Rural-urban imbalance threatened the very foundations of this republic, Freeman told an audience at the Smithsonian Institution.⁶³ It was not a rural or urban problem alone, but a shared national problem. The nation needed a framework that would direct growth and avert disaster: "I

⁶¹ Address by Secretary Freeman before the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in Omaha, Nebraska, 18 September 1967. NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XI B2c(2 O.L. Freeman Sept 67."

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "Growth Country—Living Country," Remarks by Secretary Freeman at the opening of the Rural Industrialization Meeting, History and Technology Building, Smithsonian Institution, 27 September 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XI B2c(2 O.L. Freeman Sept 67."

have never been more sincere than in the belief that if we don't do something to restore rural-urban balance in this land, we are inviting national disaster well before the year 2000."⁶⁴

Cities would break down without a restoration of rural-urban balance and rural America was the wise alternative to the urban future, Freeman argued in October 1967.⁶⁵ Partly motivating Freeman's stance was a frustration with the assumption that cities were the inevitable sites for the future of the country's communities and population—an assumption he believed pervaded American life and thought and War on Poverty workers and social scientists. He took great issue with the "urbanist school that believes the megalopolis is the wave of the future, with the countryside being preserved as a kind of huge national park where urbanites rest their nerves before plunging once again into the maelstrom of the city." The "megapolitan mentality" so "rampant" was based on a series of societal myths.⁶⁶ The future of American cities depended in great part on the viability of small towns and farms. Freeman was not a "rural fundamentalist," he insisted. He did not believe the farm and small town necessarily nurtured virtue, while "the city and its suburb nurture sin," and he did not advocate a mass back-to-the-farm movement. But he

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ This concept of rural America as an alternative was also articulated by the USDA as rural America being a "Second America." "More and more people are becoming aware that there is an alternative to bigger and bigger cities—urban areas which now hold 7 out of every 10 Americans on just over one percent of the Nation's total land area. The alternative is rural America—where space is abundant, living is good, and the community is built to human scale. We are well on our way to making this 'Second America' as attractive economically as it is now in terms of natural beauty, clean environment and unharried living" ("Town and Country USA," 28 December 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman Dec 67)").

⁶⁶ Statement of Secretary Freeman at a symposium on "A Nation's Policy for its Future," American Institute of Planners conference, 6 October 1967, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c (2 O.L. Freeman Oct 67)."

did believe that a viable alternative to city-suburban living needed to exist for those who desired such an alternative.⁶⁷

The present situation in America did not live up to the American past or its future potential. An America “benighted by formless suburban sprawl, cancerous with decaying inner-city ghettos,” and too many people in too little space was unworthy of a nation that swept across a wilderness, subdued it and built a civilization that had conferred more bounty on more of its people than any other. An America plagued with pollution was unworthy of a people who had the technology, money and the will to send people to the moon. An America paralyzed by local governments and caught in the confusion of the state-federal system was unworthy of a people who devised the Constitution, the Land-Grant system of colleges, the New Deal and all the other responses to problems of previous ages. Those who forged the nation did not allow impersonal forces to shape it; rather, they were “masters of their destiny” and set out consciously “to create a future, to invent one.” Americans had to reclaim that mentality to reclaim the future of the nation from disaster, Freeman asserted. The nation had not planned for the migration of 20 million people from rural areas to cities since World War II, or the disappearance of three million farms and was now paying the price.⁶⁸

Planning for and building a new America could be achieved but would take “a frontier-like commitment of energy, courage, imagination—and money,” Freeman

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Remarks by Secretary Freeman at the Governor’s Conference on Industrial Development, West Virginia, 5 June 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, “XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman June 1968.”

argued.⁶⁹ Such a commitment could give the American people the common purpose and inspiration that seemed lacking in “this 20th century life of quantity, not quality.” The frontier of the Nation’s birth was gone, and now America confronted far more complicated frontiers of space, peace and plenty.⁷⁰ The kind of rugged individualism required to confront “space age problems” could not rely on pious and half-baked platitudes about the good old days, but on a directed plan for the future.

American leaders and citizens had to rethink how the nation’s space ought to be used, John Baker asserted in 1968. America stood at a “fork in the highway of history.” One fork led past geographically spaced Communities of Tomorrow where man could realize his full limit of spiritual attainment. These communities would create a civilization where people were not crowded on top of each other, but where each man could work in full dignity in his own “space bubble”—a civilization with enough space to make “living livable” and to “abate the evils of smog and air pollution that threaten to smother us, to abate water pollution that threatens to poison and kill our fish.”

At the most fundamental of levels, the conservation of natural resources, particularly the “new” and “creative” conservation that focused on natural beauty,

⁶⁹ Ibid, 3. In one anecdotal piece of evidence demonstrating the changing scene in rural America, and providing another perspective on the goings ons in 1968, the *New York Times* covered the 1968 state fair commenting that “fun” took precedence over actual farming in its article: “State Fair Focuses on Fun; Farming Takes a Back Seat.” The focus was still on agriculture, but the official theme of the year’s fair was “Recreation.” “Young men are beardless and most of them smile eagerly as they hold hands with their girls or carry large stuffed animals that they have won in the innumerable pitching contests.” The exhibits displayed a changing America. “Instead of a sturdy pair of rubber galoshes in which to tour his snowy fields, today’s farmer may consider buying a shiny aluminum snowmobile with imitation-leopard seat covers.” His wife might be tempted by a sewing machine with an electronic speed control, “that is, if she sews.” The attendance continued to break records, but the crowd was different: “But they are a different crowd from the farmers who used to flock to the fair like merchants to a market place. The old-timers still greet each other in the cattle barns, where sad-eyed Brown Swiss cows lie in the hay and chew their cuds, but on the whole, the crowd is young and carefree” (“State Fair Focuses on Fun; Farming Takes a Back Seat,” August 29, 1968).

⁷⁰ Freeman, Remarks at the Governor’s Conference.

ecological well-being and interdependence based around wise use, was vital to creating a viable future for the nation and ensuring national welfare. "Our conservation of our resources is essential to the building of the Communities of Tomorrow and the fulfillment of the American dream," John Baker declared in 1968. It was necessary to prevent "exploitation, destruction or neglect."⁷¹ To talk about conservation, was ultimately, to talk about everything, because it touched nearly every aspect of human life. Too many Americans only paid lip service to conservation without the attendant action, but now was the time to develop strategies that would preserve and improve the planet's habitat and balance its ecology so that the planet would be safe for man and all living things.⁷²

The forces of progress in America had created vast problems in resource development, protection and wise-use, Baker acknowledged. The very science and technological advancements that had made "possible the greatest affluence known in the history of man" had also created a serious threat to man. Echoing current environmentalist doomsday predictions, Baker pointed out that scientists and scholars argued that "the environmental issue" could determine the survival of the human race,

⁷¹ Remarks of John A. Baker at the annual conference of State Conservationists, Lincoln, Nebraska, 16 September 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, "XI-B2c(2(a Ass't Sec. & Under Apr-Dec '68)." Baker announced the federal Department of Agriculture was committed to six areas of high-priority action: 1) reducing damages and losses from pollution to soil, water and air by agricultural chemicals, and other operations like mining; 2) revitalizing rural communities; 3) maintaining and improving the quality of rural living as an "attractive, healthful place to live" through increased assistance; 4) expanding outdoor recreation on both private and public lands to help meet public demand and strengthen the economy of the countryside; 5) enhancing natural beauty through landscaping, protection of soils and plants and other conservation duties and 6) protecting public health in both rural and urban areas by controlling pests and food quality.

⁷² "Tomorrow's Countryside," Address by John A. Baker, at the 33rd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Houston, Texas, 11 March 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder "XI B2c(2(a Ass't Sec's Jan-Mar. 68."

and that human pollution could lead to utter ecological disaster.⁷³ These were the consequences of the nation's success that Udall had referred to at the 1962 White House conference. Those very forces of progress that also caused problems could be "applied toward enhancement of living for all our people," but to do so, Americans had to look not to the sky or to space, but to the ground. "We must look to the land," Baker admonished, to solve the negative and unintended consequences of success and the growing crises.⁷⁴

Indeed, the rural-urban imbalance crisis represented one facet of a larger sense of crisis in American life in the late 1960s. The Vietnam War was escalating with unclear results, causing strife both at home and abroad, unrest and violence in cities continued to unfold, and a sense of panic about the increasing demands on the planet and the survivability of the human race grew. In 1968, the book, *The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich, a Stanford University biologist, was published and quickly became a bestseller. The controversial book argued the planet could not withstand the current trend in population growth, both in terms of food production, distribution and other environmental factors, and the human race would face mass starvation in the 1970s and 1980s without some way to limit population growth. Adding to the sense of crisis that Ehrlich's book and other environmental predictions caused, all of these problems took

⁷³ Speech by John A. Baker at the launching of the nationwide program, "Outdoor Patterns for People," George Washington National Forest, New Market Gap, Virginia, 21 September 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Files, Box 1.4/77, Folder, "XI-B2c(2(a Ass't Sec. & Under Apr-Dec '68)." It is important to recognize that even though the conservation message of the USDA in the late 1960s carried many environmental themes, such as ecological health, human-man relationship, pollution abatement, and the importance of natural beauty, the message also retained traditional elements, with USDA officials often saying that conservation efforts were to make the world safer and healthier for man.

⁷⁴ Address by John A. Baker, 11 March 1968. In another speech, never used by Baker, he called for a "modern day Marshall plan to fight the evils of the city," stating in a letter to someone that this concept "gives a pretty good current picture of rural areas development" (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A. Baker, Box 1.4/A-2).

place within the context of potential nuclear war, which created constant anxiety about possible global annihilation.⁷⁵ Freeman and Baker were not alone in deploying apocalyptic language and proceeding to act on what were perceived to be multiple unfolding crises during this time.

Rebellions and protests tore the nation apart—in the form of urban riots, in the confrontation of youth, mainly white college students, with established institutions of cultural, economic and political power and in the form of a countercultural movement. The emergence of the New Left in the 1960s represented the discontent of young people with those in power, and this discontent increased with the escalation of the Vietnam War, embodied in an active, sometimes violent, anti-war movement that broke out across many college campuses by 1968. Concerns about the environment were never at the core of the radical New Left movement, but for many members of the New Left, “the degradation of the environment became a powerful symbol of the exploitive character of capitalism.” Furthermore, by the late 1960s, the news media had begun to report on the herbicides being sprayed across Vietnam by the United States, causing many to link the “war against nature” and environmental degradation to the horrors of the Vietnam war. For many intellectuals, “the movement to end the war and the movement to protect the environment became aspects of one all-encompassing struggle.”⁷⁶ Also at the heart of the

⁷⁵ Adam Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance’: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *The Journal of American History* 90:2 (2003): 542. Ehrlich carried to a much wider audience ideas that had been in circulation for at least twenty years. Fairfield Osborn and William Vogt published similar themes in *Our Plundered Planet* and *Road to Survival* respectively; the latter was the “largest-selling conservation book prior to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*” (Tim Lehman, *Public Lands, Private Values: Farmland Preservation Policy, 1933-1985* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995], 50-51). Both books were published in 1948.

⁷⁶ Rome, “Give Earth a Chance,” 542, 547.

New Left movement was what one historian argues was a "search for authenticity."

Nature, in the eyes of many of the New Left, proved to be more "authentic" than the constructions of human society, particularly the powerful structures of capitalism.⁷⁷

Environmentalism and relations with the natural world resonated more with those who embraced the counterculture. During the 1960s, thousands of Americans fled their traditional lives to live on rural communes, to be closer to nature and to escape the materialistic, consumer-based and ecologically unhealthy culture that they viewed dominated American life. Interestingly, the vision of the Communities of Tomorrow put forth by the hulking, bureaucratic Department of Agriculture and the counterculture communities both sought to create enlightened communities more in tune with nature and rural spaces, though they emerged from very different places in American society. And both were reacting to problems in America's cities—to the potential ecological and social

⁷⁷ Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4. Rossinow argues that the "civil rights movement, the cold war, and the cultural experience of certain social groups in the twentieth-century United States converged to produce the new left of the 1960s" (viii). Concern over the environment was not necessarily a motivating factor for the creation of the New Left, or a central concern for the movement, but did come to be an important part of the movement in the "post-SDS phase of the new left's career" of the late 1960s (274). The new left and the counterculture "added to the budding ecology movement a cultural and political critique far more radical than that articulated by earlier environmental activism," he writes (274). As both Rome and Rossinow point out, part of why ecological concern "worked as an issue for the left at this time" was because "criticism of corporate capitalism and its impact on the physical world coexisted in the new left with a cultural critique of pervasive attitudes toward that world" (275).

The relationship between the New Left and rural America seems less drawn out in the historical literature, perhaps because there is not much to draw. Taking the ecological criticism and anti-corporate stance of the New Left to its logical end, the movement would likely have opposed agribusiness and the development of large-scale agriculture, and the USDA's support of both those trends, though whether it took a public stance on those issues I do not know. Today, a vital core of the local and alternative agriculture movement is universities and college towns. While the white youth of the radical New Left, mostly suburban, middle class and college-educated, were fascinated with African-American culture, they were also, as Rossinow points out, fascinated with the "authenticity of white working-class culture" which sometimes took a rural bent—in the white "folk" of Appalachia, or white cowboy culture of Texas and roots music. This turn toward white, male cowboy culture proved difficult for a movement that sought to fight white supremacy and support African-Americans, and white, rural culture would actually become an important part of the rise of conservatism in the 1970s (289-91). See also Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), xiv, xv.

disaster that the nation's cities faced. Hippies did not just seek to commune with nature, but were also motivated by "apocalyptic visions of the collapse of industrial civilization. Smog alerts, water shortages, pesticide scares, power outages, traffic tie-ups—all suggested that the urban environment soon would be deadly to both body and soul."⁷⁸ Though the communes did not last long (farming was hard, often boring work, after all), the alternative vision they established for rural living and local agriculture did, ironically, share some elements with the reform visions coming out of the USDA, including more contact with nature and belief in the societal renewal that rural spaces could provide.

The growing national concern with the rural-urban balance issue was not lost in the political realm, particularly with the 1968 presidential election looming. Freeman sought to promote the progress the Johnson administration had made in addressing the growing crisis, particularly its programs in rural America. Republican opposition sought to blame the Democratic administrations for not doing enough in rural America, and particularly for supporting price support programs that Republicans argued caused joblessness and decline in rural areas.

In August 1967, the Republican Party's National Coordinating Committee announced the Republican rural development platform consisting of a five-point program to "help stem migration to troubled cities by rejuvenating rural America."⁷⁹ The proposals included: economic incentives for rural industry to locate in poor rural areas, particularly channeling government defense industries; increased aid for schools,

⁷⁸ Rome, "Give Earth a Chance," 544. For more on the counterculture movement and the rural communes of the 1960s, see Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

⁷⁹ "G.O.P. Seeks Help for Rural Areas," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1967.

particularly vocational education; enactment of the Opportunity Crusade, the Republican alternative to the Johnson administration's War on Poverty, which sought to coordinate private and federal efforts in education, training, welfare and health projects; provide rural areas with the same kind of employment services as those available to urban workers; and "stepping up" the work of the Economic Development Administration in poor rural areas. The *New York Times* noted that most of the members of the Republican Coordinating Committee, which included such big hitters as former President Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater and Governor Rockefeller of New York, had fought the passage of the Democratically sponsored Economic Development Administration and the Appalachian Regional Commission two years before.⁸⁰

In their proposals and in their reasoning for seeking to revitalize rural America, the Republican and Democratic rural development agendas looked remarkably similar. The GOP panel "espoused a theme frequently stated by Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman—that one key remedy to the Nation's urban problems is keeping more rural people in the country," observed *The Washington Post*.⁸¹ The Republicans' report followed a very similar warning by Secretary of Agriculture Freeman that the "rush of people into overcrowded central cities is creating a grave imbalance."⁸² The *Post*'s sympathy with Freeman's rural-urban imbalance thesis spilled over to the Republicans' call for further aid and attention to rural areas. Although much remained to be done by way of shaping programs and policies, the objective of the Republican program was

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Rural Aid Program Proposed by GOP," *The Washington Post*, August 27, 1967.

⁸² "Urban-Rural Imbalance," *The Washington Post*, August 27, 1967.

highly commendable, it concluded.⁸³ The partisan rural development proposals were fundamentally so similar that the *Post* supported them both.

Despite the similarities, the Republicans naturally emphasized that their proposals marked a departure from the Democrats and were in keeping with the rural development program launched eleven years before under Eisenhower: True D. Morse's Rural Development Program. Indeed, this connection was made all the stronger by the fact that the GOP report was prepared by Don Paarlberg, who was then serving as the head of the Republican Party's Task Force on Job Opportunities and Welfare, and who had headed the task force under Eisenhower that created the Rural Development Program. The main target of the Republicans' criticism was the Democratic party support of price supports and commodity programs, which the Republicans argued led to the depopulation of the countryside and the current crisis. "Farm programs, largely designed by the Democratic Party, have continually sought parity of prices as an objective when should have sought parity of opportunity," the report criticized.⁸⁴ It further blamed the Democrats for ignoring rural areas by doing little to create jobs for those pushed out of farming by mechanization.

The reality was that the federal rural areas development program of the 1960s did build on Morse's Rural Development Program, and the Benson administration's support of agribusiness and industrial, large-scale farming had also contributed to the depopulation of the American countryside. The dilemmas both parties sought to address were a result of combined Democratic and Republican programs, even though they each

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "G.O.P. Seeks Help for Rural Areas."

blamed the other for them. The solutions both parties offered also shared much in common. Indeed, the multiple crises America faced in the late 1960s had complex, tangled roots and while leaders of both parties offered solutions, it proved difficult to address problems in their entirety.

Calls for a National Growth Policy

One comprehensive strategy for dealing with multiple problems that leaders began to discuss more seriously by the late 1960s was the development of a national growth policy to guide American development. In February 1968, Freeman directly urged President Johnson to create a national policy for establishing rural-urban balance and national planning. Johnson had directed Vice President Humphrey to establish a cabinet-level committee, the Rural-Urban Balance Task Force, to address rural-urban balance issues, which had helped advance the "the dialogue on the need for a clearly defined national policy to make optimum use of space in planning for the future location of our rapidly growing population." Now they needed to build on that momentum.⁸⁵

A fundamental component of a successful national growth policy was the vitality and health of rural America. The USDA had established Town and Country committees across the nation in rural areas to highlight the administration's efforts to improve rural America, particularly in light of the 1968 presidential election. The President, Freeman argued, should be closely identified with the administration's concerns for rural America and the growing interest and concern in rural-urban balance. Freeman hoped the

⁸⁵ Orville Freeman to the President, 19 February 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/77a Part 4, Folder, "Freeman's Personal File-Set 1, 1/1/68-3/31/68."

President would publicly express concern for rural America on every possible occasion. With so much "attention focused on big cities," the President's "identification with Town and Country USA is increasingly important." "I repeat, Mr. President," Freeman argued, "that I am completely convinced that we need such a policy, one that will be sensitive to the people-space equation as it directs the development of this nation to a balanced mix of metropolitan, suburban, new town, growth center development which will make possible a whole new dimension of living and correct some of the tremendous metropolitan problems we face today."⁸⁶

The urge for President Johnson to support rural America and the creation of a rural-urban planning policy derived from genuine concern and political expediency; in February 1968 Johnson was still publicly planning to run for president. Certainly other pressing concerns weighed on the president's mind during that time, perhaps most notably the Tet Offensive launched by North Vietnam and the Vietcong against South Vietnam on January 31, 1968. The developments of the Vietnam War, coupled with Johnson's poor showing in the New Hampshire primary (which he won, but not by as much as he had hoped), influenced Johnson's decision not to seek the nomination of the Democratic party for the 1968 presidential election, a decision he announced on March 31, 1968.

Johnson's decision to not run again for president did not affect the vigor with which Freeman and others in the administration pursued their push for a rural-urban balance policy to guide America's growth, nor did it dim the intensity of the message that

⁸⁶ Ibid.

America's fate as a nation depended on the health of rural America and the conservation of natural resources. If anything, the call for a national policy and the extremity of the situation increased, particularly after the widespread breakout of riots and violence across more than 60 American cities in the aftermath of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

A national policy to guide America's growth was ever more crucial in light of the "blind rush to self-destruction" which now threatened metropolitan America, Freeman told an audience at the annual convention of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference in August 1968. Americans had to plan now for an America that offered "a free choice of a good life everywhere—in the inner city, in the suburbs, in new rural towns, in small rural communities, and on the farm." The riots, crime, unrest and poverty shaking American society were now beginning to be recognized as the products of "rural-urban imbalance." What was urgently needed was not piecemeal, but comprehensive planning.⁸⁷

In the summer and fall of 1968, Freeman continued to push the concept of multi-county areas development as a viable alternative to cities, and encouraged the further development of rural renewal programs and the RC&D areas. There was more "fertile ground for domestic peace and tranquility in these areas" than in cities. He was not

⁸⁷ USDA press release, "Secretary Freeman Calls for National Policy to Guide America's Growth," 8 August 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman July-Oct 68)." The next day, August 9, Freeman had a very similar message for the audience attending the annual Rural Electrification Administration field conference in Washington, DC. The USDA was broadening its focus, he told them, to "Town and Country USA," and urged a national policy supporting this concept. "Too many Americans think that trouble in the cities and the decline of rural areas are separate and unrelated matters. And we do not have a national development policy...for the Nation as a whole. But we desperately need one." (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman July-Oct 68)).

arguing that the small towns and farming areas of America were "models for sweetness and light," but rather that the potential for human solutions to current problems was greater there. It was time for a "bold new experiment in American living" and the commitment to a "pluralistic society in the realm of the environment." To achieve this end, the practical concept of organized planning and development in multi-county nonmetropolitan regions had to become intellectually respectable. It was time for the nation to engage in such a "pioneering venture in planning."⁸⁸

Comprehensive planning was essential for allowing all Americans equal opportunity to achieve the American dream. America had the capital, labor and technology to revitalize and rebuild its communities and now was the time to harness those resources and to commit to that effort. Freeman believed the federal government was the tool to create and implement a national policy for land and people.⁸⁹ America's leaders and citizens could choose planned, coordinated, attractive development, or allow and encourage exploitation and unguided expansion that would prove costly to correct later. Wide area planning could rebuild the countryside and the cities so that a quality of life worthy of the American ideal became available to all Americans.

In his call for a national policy on rural-urban balance and growth, Freeman became one of the strongest voices in the federal government to advocate for a thoughtful approach to guiding American growth patterns. As historian Tim Lehman observes, the

⁸⁸ Address by Freeman before the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in Omaha, NE.

⁸⁹ Freeman addressed a seminar on national development policy at the Regional Conference on the Future Environment of a Democracy sponsored by the American Institute of Planners and association organizations July 17, 1968. "Finally," he said, "the national government, the only device the citizen has for shaping and ordering the development of the entire Nation and its institutions, must be given the capacity to deal effectively with the crisis of our time" (NAL, USDA History Files, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman July-Oct 68").

“first call” for a more orderly approach to federal policies guiding national growth came not from urban sources, but from the Department of Agriculture and the “rural spaces of Minnesota.”⁹⁰ Freeman viewed the Housing and Urban Development Act, signed August 1, 1968 as landmark legislation, charting a course for “rural-urban cooperation upon which this Nation could achieve its ideal of opportunity of choice, of human dignity, for all.”⁹¹ The national policy Orville Freeman called for never materialized, at least not on the comprehensive, national scale with federal direction that he had envisioned, the Communities of Tomorrow were not built in a centrally planned way, and recreation did

⁹⁰ Lehman, *Public Values, Private Lands*, 71. “Freeman was interested in forging agricultural policies that could prove politically sustainable in a predominantly urban society, and he naturally saw crowded slums and depopulated countrysides as indissolubly linked problems.” Lehman also writes that the call for a federal approach to national growth came “surprisingly” from Freeman and agriculture. Certainly just looking at the topic on the surface, it might seem strange that Freeman would be the first to call for such a national policy, but my dissertation sheds more light on why that was so, and ideally makes this call by Freeman less surprising.

⁹¹ Freeman’s statement on Minnesota Rural Development tour, 11-12 August 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, “XIB2c(2 O.L. Freeman July-Oct 68.” In another example of federal agencies teaming up for urban and rural cooperation, in June 1967 the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) cosponsored a conference on “Soil, Water and Suburbia.” The purpose of the conference, according to USDA press materials, was “to bring together key public officials, planners, engineers, developers and representatives of business and finance to exchange information and explore approaches to the many critical soil and water management problems they face in suburban development” (NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Addenda, Files of John A Baker, Box 1.4/A-22, Folder, “VIB9j National Conferences.”). Historian Adam Rome writes that the partnership of the agencies seemed odd—one was one of the oldest in the capitol, and the other had just been created. The conference was, in his analysis, a sign of a new “urban consciousness” in Washington. In the postwar decades, “almost all the nation’s population growth had come in cities and suburbs, and intellectuals and policymakers slowly began to come to terms with the growing power of metropolitan America... To meet the needs of the metropolitan majority, legislators and administrators around the country struggled to rethink the responsibilities of government, and the reconceptualization affected everything from the apportionment of legislative seats to the structure of government departments.” To remain relevant, Rome argues, the “old bureaucracies with rural roots started to pay more attention to the urban environment. The joint conference in 1967 thus was important as a bridge between the past and the future” (*The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 189). The 1967 conference was followed by an Advisory Commission of Intergovernmental Relations Report on Urban and Rural America in 1968 and by the enactment in 1970 of Title VII of the Housing and Urban Development Act, which required the president to publish four biennial reports on national growth (Lehman, *Public Values, Private Lands*, 72).

not become the leading income-producer for America's farms by 1984, as he had optimistically declared in 1964.⁹²

Even though this was the case, the ideological and policy thrusts of postwar conservation and the broader related issues that conservation addressed during the 1960s continued into the 1970s, influencing the formation of the nation's fundamental rural development legislation, the Rural Development Act of 1972 and Nixon administration conservation and rural development policy. The concern and debate over rural-urban balance and the role rural America's resources could play in righting the nation, including an innovative conservation plan to guide the transforming American landscape, continued to rage, and did not fade as the Johnson administration left office—as so many issues did not. Indeed, the rural-urban imbalance problem continued to influence policymakers, leaders and members of Congress in the Nixon years, waning by the mid 1970s as other crises took center stage.⁹³

⁹² As Tim Lehman observes, "with the full weight of the American political tradition against the formation of a national policy governing private lands, it is not surprising that the national growth policy discussion remained only that, yet the discussion was informative even if it led to very little change" (*Public Values, Private Lands*, 72).

⁹³ *Ibid.* The discussion about national growth policies and the search for a solution to growth problems was truly a bi-partisan effort. The discussion began "during the last years of a liberal Democratic administration, continued and even advanced under Richard Nixon, moved along in Congress during the Ford interregnum, then faded in the late 1970s despite some support from the Carter administration," writes Lehman. "This unusual political context suggests that national growth policy was not so much an ideological matter as it was a search for more orderly and rational federal policies."

Chapter 5: Conservation, Restoration and Rural Development, 1969-1972

Introduction

This final chapter explores the continuation of USDA postwar conservation ideology into the late 1960s and 1970s. Concern over rural-urban imbalance and growing environmentalist concerns influenced Nixon Administration policies and spurred Congressional action. For example, many of the conservation ideas, programs and policies of the 1960s begun under the direction of Orville Freeman informed the creation of the nation's fundamental rural development legislation, the 1972 Rural Development Act. The Rural Development Act, in addition to other agricultural and rural development legislation not covered under the Act, contained key provisions that embodied the new dimensions of postwar conservation, such as concerns over beauty and balance, the multiple-use of private lands and addressing new relationships between rural and urban America. The Rural Development Act's creation also solidified the expanding purview and responsibilities of the USDA for which Freeman had advocated over the previous eight years. All of these developments were of course not without controversy. Journalists continued to debate the changing relationship between the agricultural industry and rural America that had emerged over the past two decades, as well as the appropriate policies to best guide America's natural resources.

By the mid-1970s, many of the concerns that had spurred the new directions in conservation ideology and programs in the mid 1950s and 1960s began to fade, replaced by new concerns. With the global economic crisis of 1973-74 and economic hard times, Americans no longer focused on what to do with excess leisure time outdoors, but instead

on how to work enough to pay the bills. Environmental concerns shifted from focusing on the preservation of outdoor space and recreation to human health, toxins and ecological wellbeing. Making the Great Society was no longer a federal priority and the American public reacted against the tumult of the times. In the agricultural world, the focus shifted from a surplus crisis to a potential global food scarcity crisis, leading the USDA to lift production controls and expand the amount of agricultural acreage available in the United States for traditional production. At the same time, a critique of the farm establishment emerged that saw modern agriculture as an ecological and social failure and urged a federal farmland preservation program.

Winding Down the Johnson Years

As the Johnson administration came to a close, Freeman reflected on the past eight years and on the challenges of the future. In the realm of conservation, the USDA had "built on and broadened existing resource conservation programs and initiated new ones to upgrade the quality of the American environment," he wrote in his final annual report to the President. But much remained to be done. The Department of Agriculture needed to continue to expand facilities for outdoor recreation, double soil survey work, quadruple the rate of completions of small watershed projects, and expand programs for water quality control and agricultural pollution control.¹

Freeman highlighted the successes and the potential of the Resource Conservation and Development projects in the national effort to create a more "wholesome balance

¹ Freeman, "Agriculture in Transition," final report to the President, Washington, DC, 7 January 1969, p. 6, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2c(2) Freeman Jan. 69."

between rural and urban life.” This initiative, as of December 1968, spanned 51 projects, located in 39 states, over 293 counties and 169 million acres and affected 8 million people.² More federal government credit than ever was available to finance new housing, water and sewer systems, recreation and conservation projects, and off-farm income had increased as a result. Freeman felt rewarded because “twice as many Americans are enjoying outdoor recreation” and the nation was “increasingly and militantly conservation conscious.”³

The USDA’s expansion of purpose over the previous eight years was a critical part of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations’ legacies. The Department’s roots remained on the farms of America, and the programs for commercial family farmers had been broadened and sharpened. But “our horizon has expanded in 8 years to include all of rural America, and we have developed and funded programs to serve the unmet needs off the farm that increasingly cry for attention.” Freeman cited the increased expenditures between 1960 and 1968 for investment in rural development and combating rural poverty, an investment that had tripled to over \$2.3 billion. These efforts included the conservation programs of the Soil Conservation Service, the Farmers Home Administration, the Forest Service and many others. Increased expenditures for recreational development, water and sewer systems and other facilities had been designed

² USDA press release, “Secretary Freeman Writes President of Resource Conservation and Development Success,” 23 December 1968, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, “XIB2d(2) Freeman Oct. 68-“

³ Address by Freeman at the annual Minnesota State ASCS Conference Banquet, St. Paul Minnesota, 9 January 1969, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, “XIB2c(2) Freeman Jan. 69.”

to give rural America the ability to provide the social and economic opportunity needed to avoid the causes of poverty.⁴ Even with these efforts, much more remained to be done.

The rural-urban imbalance problem remained critical and had to be addressed by the incoming administration and with a new intellectual framework that included a national growth policy.⁵ Rural-urban balance was a national challenge that demanded an integrated solution. "It cannot be met by concentrating on city, suburb, or countryside alone, but only by moving on all three at once, and in the context of the whole nation. That means that our planning must be based on nationwide physical, economic, social and cultural geography, not just political geography," Freeman wrote in May 1969. Until the nation had such a national policy, the problems of city and countryside would remain insoluble. The "interaction between them will continue to compound the problem of each. Only a common national policy with complementary efforts in city, suburb and countryside can restore the balance to America."⁶ Freeman called on President Nixon to launch such an effort. If the President of the United States would launch a total national planning effort, new hope and new spirit would quicken people and institutions across the nation.⁷

⁴ USDA press release, "Freeman cites USDA Anti-Poverty Role," 19 December 1968, NAL, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Freeman Era Staff Files, Box 1.4/74, Folder, "XIB2d(2) Freeman Oct. 68."

⁵ "Farmers Looking in New Direction: to Nixon for Change," *The New York Times*, January 6, 1969. The national press associated the rural solution to the urban crisis with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and particularly with Freeman. "The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations advanced the concept of seeking solutions to the urban crisis by stimulating the economy of rural areas. In particular, Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman has sought to tie the urban troubles directly to rural problems and projected ideas of rebuilding a declining rural America to ease the population and other growth problems of the metropolitan areas," wrote the *Times*.

⁶ Orville Freeman, "Towards a National Policy on Balanced Communities," *Minnesota Law Review* 53:6 (1969): 1167.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1168.

Nixon, Conservation, and "Restoration"

In the realm of conservation and rural development, the Nixon administration remained in many ways ideologically connected to the 1960s agenda that had emerged under Kennedy and Johnson and extended the legacies of those administrations. As it had under Kennedy and Johnson, the Farmers Home Administration under Nixon constituted the largest share of the total USDA rural development budget and remained the central entity for rural development action.

In other ways, however, the Nixon administration diverged. It believed that the federal government should play a less active role in local communities, and to this end, dismantled organizational structures put in place during the 1960s that allowed more federal intervention on the ground, such as the Technical Action Panels (TAPs). The Rural Areas Development county committees, the hallmark of 1960s rural development action, were also dismantled and the leadership of those committees transferred to the Extension Service. As historian Dennis Roth writes, Republicans had "always favored the Extension Service over other USDA agencies because of its mixed Federal, State, and local operation."⁸ In January 1970, the Extension Service was given control over outreach and received an additional appropriation of \$1 million for agents to assist local rural development leaders in 30 multicounty areas.⁹ In addition to those institutional changes, the Nixon Administration proposed an extensive reorganization of the entire federal government, which included breaking down the duties of the U.S. Department of

⁸ Dennis Roth, "The Nixon Administration Through Passage of the Rural Development Act of 1972," *Federal Rural Development Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2002), 2.

⁹ Ibid.

Agriculture into four new bureaucratic departments: the Departments of Human Resources; Community Development; Natural Resources; and Economic Development. The dismantling of the USDA never occurred because Congress and the agricultural lobby strongly opposed the idea, fearing urban interests would come to dominate.

Ideologically, the revitalization of rural America and the search for a rural-urban balance continued to motivate Nixon administration officials and policies, even though Nixon's Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, personally had little interest in rural development and focused mainly on commercial agriculture.¹⁰ One major objective of the Nixon administration, stated USDA Under Secretary J. Phil Campbell in December 1970, was the "revitalization of rural America." Directly related to this goal was a need to adjust American growth patterns and direct future Americans away from congested urban spaces. With another 75 million Americans expected by the end of the century, a sound growth policy to achieve a healthy distribution of population was essential, and a

¹⁰ Butz was Nixon's second Secretary of Agriculture and served as President Gerald Ford's Secretary of Agriculture. He was appointed Secretary on December 2, 1972 and served until October 4, 1976, when he made a racist remark that resulted in his resignation. Butz had left his post as chairman of Ralston Purina, a manufactured foods and livestock feed company, to become Secretary of Agriculture. His nomination was controversial because of his strong ties to agribusiness, which he continued to foster as Secretary. As Secretary, Butz reversed the decades-long policies of production controls and implemented a policy of raising farm incomes by increasing both farm production and food exports. He advised farmers to plant "fencerow to fencerow." Farmers planted 25 million more acres in 1974 than they had in 1972, and by 1977 this number had increased by another 20 million acres (Tim Lehman, *Public Values, Private Lands: Farmland Preservation Policy, 1933-1985* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995], 60). Earl Butz serves as a focal point of what went wrong in 20th century American farm policy in current critiques of the American agricultural system. See, for example, Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006). Clifford M. Hardin was appointed as Secretary of Agriculture by Nixon in 1969 and served until November 1971. During his tenure, Hardin, an experienced agricultural economist, successfully extended the federal food stamp program and established the Agriculture Department's Food and Nutrition Service. He opposed an executive plan to "cash out" the food stamp program—administering cash aid instead of food stamps—because he worried farmers would oppose it and that would kill welfare reform. The cash-for-food-stamps plan was never implemented. After his time in Washington, he became vice chairman and vice president for research at Ralston Purina (Patricia Sullivan, "Clifford Hardin, 94, dies; agriculture chief under Nixon," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 2010).

sound rural development policy would create the necessary climate of opportunity in rural America that would make it an attractive place to work and live.¹¹

Nixon had campaigned on the issue of rural revitalization, attacking the Johnson administration for its “alleged failure to devise imaginative programs to reduce the level of poverty and increase the economic attractiveness of rural America.” By depopulating the countryside “we have overpopulated our cities and in the process we have created deepening problems in the areas and towns they left behind,” accused Nixon. Nixon joined the critics who opposed the rural policies of the Johnson Administration, including the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who had charged President Johnson and his cabinet with insufficient attention to the “poor of the country-side.”¹² Ultimately, while he campaigned against the Johnson administration for political purposes, and appealed to the nation’s “Silent Majority,” Nixon continued much of what the Johnson administration had tried to do in the realms of rural conservation and development. This was the case in many policy arenas.

That many Americans reacted against liberalism and were weary of the 1960s—a reaction that helped to give rise to the conservative ascension in popular politics during

¹¹ Address by Under Secretary J. Phil Campbell before the Cotton Producers Association, 15 December 1970, NAL, USDA History Collection, Series 1, Subseries 4, Section XI, Box 1.4/73, Folder, “XIB2c The Secretary.” Campbell stated the future of agriculture, “will be determined in part by continued progress in production and market efficiency—advances in research and technology which will result in new ways of farming and marketing.” He also predicted “it will be determined in part by the continued trend toward fewer and larger farms,” and by how the “vast increases in agricultural capital investment that will be required” would be managed. Also shaping the future of agriculture, he told his audience, was a “relatively new concept—namely, that commercial agriculture is a business, a way of making a living rather than a way of life.” On these fronts he was right.

¹² “Nixon Proposes Rural Aid to Arrest Move to Cities,” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1968.

the 1970s and 80s—is a phenomenon that many historians have explored.¹³ Indeed, Nixon appealed to the nation's "Silent Majority" and capitalized on this weariness to win the 1968 presidential election and the broad sweeping liberal vision of the Great Society dissipated. At the same time, however, whatever conservatives in government wanted to say about big government, regulation and intervention, after Nixon was elected he knew he could not actually roll back the Great Society.

Understanding and emphasizing the continuity from the 1960s to the 1970s, politically, ideologically and institutionally, is important for understanding the endurance of postwar conservation measures. Postwar conservation programs constituted another example of continuity that historians have explored in other realms, such as the environment, civil rights and education. Historical studies have shown how and why many of the institutions and programs of the Great Society remained intact, and, ironically, how the federal government continued to expand after the 1960s on the domestic front during conservative administrations. These continuities reflected the reality that what were initially "bold departures in policy became embedded in the fabric of American politics, irrespective of who occupied the White House" through bureaucratic and institutional inertia.¹⁴ Postwar conservation measures were not

¹³ See, for example, William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996). For a recent book on the rise of the right, see Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

¹⁴ Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow: Education Politics from Johnson to Reagan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 6. Davies uses education politics and policy to explore the growth of government in what has otherwise been interpreted as an "antigovernment" era, the 1970s and 1980s. He argues that changes in electoral politics should not obscure the continuities of policies and programs. The leading actors in propelling and shaping federal education policymaking in the 1970s were not presidents,

controversial like some other initiatives of the 1960s and they enjoyed true bipartisan political support during the Nixon years, including support from Nixon himself. These political circumstances were important for passing rural development legislation and continuing postwar conservation programs in the early 1970s. But the ideas and programs had also been part of the federal bureaucracy since 1962, an important factor in the continuation of the programs.

In his 1970 State of the Union, Nixon carried on with the theme of "quality of life" that had so defined Johnson's Great Society and the broader goals and concerns of 1960s liberal reform. The Nixon administration would bring its "concern with the quality of life in America to the farm as well as the suburb, to the village as well as the city," he declared. Rural America needed to be dealt with, "not as a separate nation, but as part of an over-all growth policy for all America." Americans needed to "create a new rural environment that will not only stem the migration to urban centers but reverse it. If we seize our growth as a challenge, we can make the 1970s an historic period when by conscious choice we transformed our land into what we want it to become."¹⁵ Toward this end, President Nixon established a Rural Affairs Council and appointed a Task Force for Rural America. Nixon also created a Commission on Population Growth and the American Future.

but "unelected political actors": judges, career civil servants, lawyers, congressional staffers and interest group lobbyists (281). He shows that "powerful inertial forces in American political life," worked to preserve the liberal legacies of periods of reform ferment in less propitious times just as much as they constrain innovation" (2). This idea of institutional inertia propelled by unelected actors (as well as the political science concept of path dependency) and the movement away from cycles of reform as analytical frameworks for understanding political history form an important intellectual approach of the field of American Political Development (APD).

¹⁵ Nixon's State of the Union Address, January 22, 1970, as reprinted in "Nixon: The Seventies Will Be a Time of New Beginnings," *The New York Times*, January 23, 1970.

Related to balancing the nation and seeking to achieve “quality of life” goals for all Americans was the Nixon administration’s embrace of what had become a self-conscious environmental movement, which had proven to be a powerful force in American life by 1970. Journalist William V. Shannon saw Nixon’s embrace as a smart move by a “shrewd politician” who had had a nonexistent conservation record before entering the White House, but who knew an issue when he saw one. By the time Nixon took office in 1969, the “environmental movement had gained such strength and diversity that it was outstripping its previous dependence on Presidential leadership or departmental initiatives.” Like major corporations or unions, “the environmentalists have become an interest group—a ‘constituency of conscience’—so powerful that they can compel any Administration to heed their demands at least in part and to make public obeisance to their values,” Shannon concluded. Was there any politician, he wondered, who was in favor of smog, sewage-laden rivers or uncontrolled automobile exhaust?¹⁶

Indeed, it was during the Nixon years that Congress passed—and Nixon signed into law—much of what is considered the nation’s fundamental environmental legislation, building on momentum and activity of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1969, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is the basic national charter for environmental protection and created the Council on Environmental Quality. A year later, Congress passed the Clean Air Act, the federal law that regulates air emissions and created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to carry out the provisions of the law. In 1972, Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act

¹⁶ William V. Shannon, “Nixon as Conservationist,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 1971.

(MMPA) and Clean Water Act and a year later the Endangered Species Act (ESA) among other fundamental environmental legislation that created the modern environmental regulatory state. In addition to this Congressional activity, in the spring of 1970, the first "Earth Day" celebrations took place across the nation, an enormous event that in many ways solidified the environmental movement and moved it squarely onto the national stage.¹⁷

In his February 10, 1970 special message to Congress on "Environmental Quality," Nixon addressed the problems of pollution and waste that the nation faced, as well as the importance and need of outdoor recreation, declaring a "new recreation priority" and linking rural land use to the conservation and environmental agenda of his administration. This connection demonstrated the continuity of the recreation "problem" into the early 1970s and the influence of the Outdoor Recreation Resource Review Commission's recommendations. The time had come, Nixon declared, to make more rational use of the nation's enormous wealth of real property, giving a new priority to the "newly urgent concern with public recreation and to make more imaginative use of properties now surplus to finance acquisition of properties now needed." Nixon called for additional federal acquisitions of public lands, as well as protection of the Land and Water Conservation Fund supported by and passed during the Johnson administration.

¹⁷ James Morton Turner, "'The Specter of Environmentalism': Wilderness, Environmental Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right," *The Journal of American History* 96:1 (2009): 129. Turner writes that Democratic leadership was so strong on the environment that Nixon considered it "a political imperative to make environmental issues a centerpiece of his administration's first-term domestic agenda." Historian Tim Lehman observes that the "environmental movement was so strong that neither party could resist its force, and many of its important achievements came under a conservative Republican president who nevertheless absorbed many environmental ideas" (*Public Values, Private Lands*, 71). Paul Milazzo writes that "Richard Nixon's surprising contributions to federal pollution control policies. . .remained products of political expediency that failed to hold his interest" (*Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006], 4).

In addition, another vast source of potential parklands lay untapped in agricultural lands, Nixon asserted, building on the Freeman/Cochrane thesis beginning in the Kennedy years. "We have come to realize that we have too much land available for growing crops and not enough land for parks, open space and recreation." Nixon proposed helping local governments to buy selected parcels of cropland to convert to recreational resources instead of paying farmers to let it lie idle. He also proposed a conservation program of long-term contracts with private land owners of idled farmland, providing for its reforestation and public use for such pursuits as hunting, fishing, hiking and picnicking. All of these proposals marked a continuity of conservation ideology and policy of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Ultimately, Nixon called for the nation to seek "restoration" not just "conservation." Today, he remarked, "conservation" was as important as ever, but as Johnson had called for a "new conservation"—it was not enough. "No longer is it enough to conserve what we have; we must also restore what we have lost. We have to go beyond conservation to embrace restoration."¹⁸ Indeed, Nixon's support for conservation and "restoration" was indicative of the strong bipartisanship and broad constituency that supported these initiatives as well as the continuity from liberal 1960s activity that historians have documented. Like the campaign for the Wilderness Act in 1964, postwar conservation played well to both parties even though it was more strongly championed by Democrats. The USDA conservation agenda appealed to broad national values, such as agrarianism, pastoral beauty and outdoor recreation and deployed a

¹⁸ Richard Nixon, "Special Message to Congress on Environmental Quality," February 10, 1970, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, accessed through The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

moderate, incremental approach to reform that in large part depended on federal funds but local and individual control. Like those who had advocated for wilderness in the mid 1960s, advocates for rural conservation promoted a pragmatic approach that worked within the established system and did not call for radical interventionism or reform. Perhaps, most importantly, in addition to all its other goals, USDA postwar conservation at its core sought to generate economic development and create stability in suffering areas—both rural and urban—something neither party could oppose in theory.¹⁹

This moderate political strategy also worked for what would be considered newer environmental issues of the time, such as clean air and water and species protection. The bipartisanship and broad constituency that ushered in the modern environmental era appeared promising in the early 1970s. But it was not to last. The support would begin to splinter in the late 1970s and the 1980s saw a distinct conservative backlash against the environmentalist state. In the Western United States this opposition took the form of the sagebrush rebellion and the wise-use movement and contributed to a general rise of conservatism across the region. At the core of the opposition, argues James Turner, was a reaction against the increased interventionist federal role in and expanded federal responsibilities for managing environmental issues that attended the modern environmental regulatory state. This opposition manifested strongly in the arena of

¹⁹ Turner, "The Specter of Environmentalism," 126-28. Turner discusses why the Wilderness Act and the movement for it has such broad appeal and bipartisan support, citing its appeal to the public interest and broad national values, such as patriotism, recreation and spirituality as well as its moderated, pragmatic approach that included acceptance of economic development on public lands at the same time that it advocated for preservation. USDA postwar conservation contained many of the same attributes and strategies.

“older” natural resource management, such as public lands management.²⁰ While agricultural issues remained controversial in their own right, conservation on private lands did not spark such outrage, as the federal government did not wield the same regulatory control over private land use.

Debate over Rural America's Future

The United States Congress also sought to carry forth the conservation agenda of the 1960s and to craft a solution to the rural-urban imbalance crisis as it was perceived to develop in the mid to late 1960s. In Title IX of the 1970 Farm Bill, titled “Rural Development” (introduced by Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) and Senator Herman E. Talmadge (D-GA)), the Congress committed itself to “a sound balance between rural and urban America.” The Congress, continued Title IX, “considers this balance so essential to the peace, prosperity and welfare of all our citizens that the highest priority must be given to the revitalization and development of rural areas.” In addition to introducing this title to the Agricultural Act of 1970, as Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Talmadge formed a new Subcommittee on Rural Development in 1971. Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-MN) chaired this committee, and Senator Dole was a member (along with Allen J. Ellender (D-LA), James O. Eastland (D-MS), James B. Allen (D-AL), Carl T. Curtis (R-NE), and Henry Bellmon (R-OK)). Humphrey had long been interested in rural American issues and was a longtime friend and ally of Orville

²⁰ Turner, “The Specter of Environmentalism,” see especially conclusion, 146-8. Ultimately, he argues that while the wise-use movement failed to advance its policy agenda, it had lasting success in changing the policies of public lands protection and blunted the wilderness movement’s moral authority. The wise use movement shaped conservative approaches to the environment and staked out a new middle ground with regard to environmental issues, helping to shape Republican claims to environmentalism (145).

Freeman. Humphrey hired former Assistant Secretary John Baker as a consultant to the Subcommittee, ensuring continuity from the Kennedy and Johnson years.²¹

While rural development legislation garnered bi-partisan support, Republicans sought to gain their own voice in rural development agendas instead of always following the Democratic lead. Senator Dole led the Republican charge.²² A "small but determined group of Senate Republicans, tacitly encouraged by President Nixon, is challenging a bid by 1972-minded Democratic leaders over who will throw the bigger life preserver to rural America," wrote the *The Washington Post* in November 1971. Senators Talmadge and Humphrey proposed a new federal network of regional banks to generate new capital in rural areas and proposed a new bureaucracy to carry out federal aid. In the House, Agriculture Committee Chairman W.R. Poage (D-TX) also called for revising and expanding rural aid responsibility.²³

In response, Dole, who opposed the creation of any further bureaucracy, introduced a Republican bill to the Senate that called for an overhaul of rural aid programs, including grants of up to \$750 million a year to rural communities for carrying out approved development projects.²⁴ Ultimately, these various ideas would come

²¹ Roth, "The Nixon Administration," 2.

²² Despite this politicking, the rural development effort remained genuinely bi-partisan. In a hearing before the Rural Development Subcommittee, Senator Humphrey wanted to assure those in attendance, that even though Democrats had taken the leadership in rural development in the 1960s, the subcommittee was truly bi-partisan. "This is a totally bipartisan committee," he assured, "because we have the chairman of the National Republican Committee, my good friend from Kansas," referring to Robert Dole. Dole responded, charting the Nixon administration's course and efforts on the rural development front, and declaring "this is a bipartisan, or nonpartisan, or all-American problem" (*Rural Community Development Sharing Act of 1971: Hearings on S. 1612, Before the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 92nd Congress [1971], 26, 30*).

²³ Don Kendall, "Both Parties Push Aid Program for Rural Areas," *The Washington Post*, November 18, 1971.

²⁴ Ibid.

together in the passage of the 1972 Rural Development Act, which did not create a new bureaucracy or infrastructure, but placed authority for coordination and responsibility of rural development efforts at the federal level within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. While the Nixon administration had sought to place leadership for rural development at the state level, the Congress rejected this proposal and called for a national policy to be directed by the federal Department of Agriculture.

In addition to this Congressional activity, a group formed in 1971 called the "Coalition for Rural America," which advocated for the creation of a rural America interest group, motivated by the need for balanced growth and equal resource distribution. This group worked closely with Humphrey's efforts in the Senate and with other Congressional leaders. It included former Secretary of Agriculture Freeman and former governors Harold LeVander of Minnesota, Norbert Tiemann of Nebraska, Winthrop Rockefeller of Arkansas, Robert E. McNair of South Carolina, Frank Farrar of South Dakota and Edward T. Breathitt of Kentucky among other farm, business and educational leaders.²⁵ Senator James E. Pearson (R-KS) commented that the coalition was "essential if we are ever to get major rural development legislation through Congress." Humphrey added that the revitalization of non-metropolitan America had to be accelerated if the nation hoped to achieve a balanced growth pattern.²⁶ The coalition supported the efforts of Humphrey's Subcommittee on rural development, which drafted the Senate version of what would become the Rural Development Act of 1972, and John

²⁵ "Coalition Set Up for Rural Aid," *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1971.

²⁶ Ibid.

Baker wrote many of the details of this Senate version.²⁷ Even though the Subcommittee and the Nixon administration proposed different rural development legislation, Nixon still welcomed the new rural interest group, stating that every American had a "vital stake" in preserving and enriching the resources of the countryside.²⁸

The *New Republic* observed that the creation of the Coalition for Rural America attested to the growing influence of the movement for balanced growth that Orville Freeman initiated as Secretary of Agriculture. At the time, Freeman's call for urban-rural balance did not produce an overwhelming response, but a "seed had been planted." The call for national attention toward the revitalization and development of rural areas was based on the needs of both rural and urban America. The publication did not find this connection troubling, but rather some of the assumptions that underlay the call for balance.²⁹

In particular, it objected to what it perceived to be an anti-urban bias. "Less explicit in the rhetoric of 'balance' from Freeman's time onward," it wrote, "has been the subtheme that, given a choice, no good American would want to live in a city."³⁰ The

²⁷ Roth, "The Nixon Administration," 4.

²⁸ "Coalition Set Up for Rural Aid."

²⁹ "Rural and Urban Growth," *The New Republic*, September 25, 1971.

³⁰ This pro-rural assumption, that given a choice Americans would rather live in rural-based communities was also questioned by Nathaniel Gilbert in a Letter to the Editor in *The New York Times*. Gilbert, in the process of writing, revealed his own assumptions about rural life as he defended the virtues of city living. Responding to an op-ed on the wilderness, and local gardening, Gilbert opined: "City-born and city-bred, I have spent more than four decades living in New York, with only summer camp, college and an occasional visit to the hinterlands. And what I have seen of rural America, particularly in winter, leaves me cold. There is an abiding sense of isolation, insularity and anachronism about rural people and rural life. They may be self-sufficient, but that singular virtue hardly makes up for an otherwise bleak and earth-bound existence." One of the great virtues of city life, was its lack of dependence upon and even separation from nature. It was a place of man-made ambition on man's schedule, not nature's. "For the children of the city, the world is an exciting, close-knit place where man-made events enhance nature's slower-paced phenomena. Spring occurs every time there's a new museum exhibit or hit show or pennant race; and the

peril that the *New Republic* saw was the potential of diverting resources away from present need in the name of future "balance." That trajectory would, in effect, become an anti-urban growth policy that the *New Republic* feared would only deepen the disadvantages of residents of large urban areas, who already suffered under the disproportionate influence of rural interests in Congress and statehouses.³¹

Further, the *New Republic* argued, the entire premise behind the proposed growth policy was fundamentally flawed. Any growth policy based on the premise that population density or concentration was the root of urban tension was doomed to failure. The densities of American cities, for example, were far below those of their "less-troubled" European counterparts and were actually in decline when the cities "erupted" into civil disorder. The *New Republic* also anticipated that the migration to cities would decline since the mechanization of agriculture, which prompted much of the movement, was nearly complete. Ultimately, the generators of the crisis in the cities had to do more with *how* growth occurred than where; they were about the "maldistribution of resources and of the wasteful and divisive patterns of American urbanization, or keeping the poor poor, and keeping the poor and minorities in their places." Any policy that failed to deal

darkness of winter is literally set aglow by the strings of lights and store windows that are the talismans of the town. The seasons of the mind do not wait upon the equinox—the bloom of new fashion and the eclipse of a celebrity's glow are small parts of a man-made world spinning far faster than the leisurely pace of our planet. In the city apartment, life is not geared to the season, moth or even week. Space, whether it be in the refrigerator or the subway, is at a premium...Mrs. Nearing talks about digging and cultivating one's own garden; but she fails to realize that the city is the largest garden of all, offering every possible variety of idea, experience, opportunity and lifestyle. The city is a river of ideas. Its canyon walls were not made by the slow passage of endless eons, but rather cast up by the ambitions of men. You who would consort with sun and soil can never know the challenge of competition, the thrust and parry of powerful personalities, the tenuous grasp of yet another run in the 10,000-year struggle to climb together above the simple solitude of the agrarian age" (*The New York Times*, January 1, 1972).

³¹ "Rural and Urban Growth."

with these root problems would only result in the replication of crisis in the new growth centers, rural or otherwise.³²

In addition, the idea that the creation of new centers for living would stem the growth of large urban areas was deluded. This idea “flew in the face” of demographic information, experts and the negative experiences of other industrialized nations including Russia, which, with all its centralized state powers could not halt the growth of Moscow even after four decades of trying. Ultimately, the *New Republic* concluded, rural revitalization was worth pursuing for “its own sake, without pretense that it is the salvation of the cities.” Rural revitalization needed qualitative goals for rural America, most notably the “widening of options and opportunities for the rural poor and minorities.”³³

The *Wall Street Journal* also argued that lawmakers’ efforts and federal initiatives for rural America suffered from “some misconceptions” as the paper reflected on the assembling of federal rural development legislation. For many legislators, the spur to action was not the problems of rural areas but the problems of the nation’s cities. As these legislators viewed the situation, the “cities’ problems stem in large part from the continuing influx of people migrating from farms and rural communities.”³⁴ The

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ While the rural development legislation that emerged in 1972 sought to realize the Congress’s commitment to establishing a rural-urban balance, it focused on the rural side of that equation and not on urban reform per se. While the issue of national balance and growth became a central concern in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the reform efforts of agencies like the USDA were entirely rural and agricultural with goals that would affect urban centers only in the sense that rural America would become a more attractive place to live and people would relocate there. This effort was distinctly different from programs designed to directly reform urban areas, such as the Community Action Programs. The integrated reform vision of the Communities of Tomorrow would have affected all American communities and redesigned them with a rural foundation, but this transcendent vision was never realized. The commitment to restoring

problem with this conceptualization, the *Journal* further argued, was that few big cities suffered from exploding populations. Many had actually been losing population.³⁵

Over the past decade, cities had undergone a major shift in the composition of their populations as middle and upper-income residents moved to suburbs and low-income families moved in from rural America. Rural Americans did not create the problems of the cities; "other groups did it for them." Politicians were at fault as they permitted and "even speeded the deterioration of transit, politic and other vital services," while labor unions restricted job opportunities for the unskilled by pushing for higher starting salaries and minimum wages. In lawmakers' dreams, dying farm communities would become "industrial boom towns, courtesy of the federal government" and despite migration to cities (which the *Journal* acknowledged had and was continuing to happen), thousands of farmers had clung to "uneconomic farms, partly because of a hope that the government would somehow make their small plots economic." In fact, federal farm programs still channeled their benefits to bigger commercial farms, many of which could operate profitably without such help.³⁶

Stemming or reversing the tides of commercial agriculture, however, was not an option in the *Journal*'s opinion. In most of rural America, agriculture would remain the chief industry and it was substantially overstaffed. A short-term solution to this problem would be to channel some of the government's "farm-price-support billions to direct aid for the operators of those submarginal farms." In the long-term, however, the *Journal*

rural-urban balance, at least as it emerged in the 1972 Rural Development Act, saw rural and urban America as vitally connected, but as distinct, separate spaces.

³⁵ "Keeping them Down on the Farm," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 1972.

³⁶ Ibid.

recommended government-promoted training for the rural poor so they could find a place in “sophisticated commercial agriculture” or move to opportunities elsewhere.

Fundamentally, the *Journal* argued, whether the government liked it or not, most job opportunities would continue to be in or near urban areas. Only frustration would result from a policy that attempted to keep people in rural areas, or the “sort of single-minded social engineering that insists on keeping everyone down on the farm.”³⁷

The *Journal* did support one kind of farm program reform, though, and that was to detach the federal price support system from commodities and officially make farm program payments income supplements. This idea was also supported by the Farm Bureau and marked an ironic reversal for the organization, as the Farm Bureau had vociferously fought the Brannan Plan’s attempt to do just that twenty years earlier. By 1970, what Brannan had feared—the concentration of power in agribusiness corporations, the dominance of large-scale farms and concentration of land ownership, the decline of the medium-sized and small farms—had come to pass. While the Farm Bureau had never supported the federal program of price supports, it now perceived that Congress treated its payments system more as a “welfare plan than a farm program.” Farm Bureau president Bruce Schulman suggested Congress go all the way with that idea and that the Farm Bureau accept the idea of income supplements. The government’s attempts for years to manage the rural economy in such a way to keep production going and support

³⁷ Ibid.

farmers who really needed aid had failed as the majority of aid had gone to large, commercial farms.³⁸

The reform of federal farm payments in this way would be an adaptation, "to the needs of the low income people of rural America," Schulman concluded. Simple justice demanded that income supplements be available to all farmers on a basis of need regardless of whether or not they produced certain crops or were in compliance with crop allotments. He further argued the government should phase out efforts to manage supplies and prices altogether since the larger farmers could get along just fine on their own. The details of such a program would be up for debate, the *Journal* put forth, but there was no question in its mind that a federal farm program would be "far more helpful if the aid were directed to farmers who really need it."³⁹ Indeed, one journalist remarked that the "threat to the 'family farm' and the way of life it represents is so strong that even the American Farm Bureau Federation, the nation's largest and most conservative farm organization shows symptoms of upheaval." In the past, the Farm Bureau had vigorously opposed federal intervention in the farm economy. But now it was "swallowing its ideology" and asking for federal laws to "strengthen individual farmers in dealing with the new corporate forces in agriculture."⁴⁰

These debates over the appropriate direction of American agriculture in the middle decades of the twentieth century were tied up in questions over land use policy

³⁸ "Welfare Plan for Farmers," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 1970.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Nick Kotz, "Agribusiness Threatens Family Farm," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1971.

and the shape of the American landscape and communities.⁴¹ In his series on the corporate forces reshaping the agricultural industry and rural America for the *Washington Post*, journalist Nick Kotz explored how trends toward corporate agribusiness and large-scale agriculture reshaped the American landscape. Already 74 percent of Americans lived on only one percent of the nation's land, and if this continued, 60 percent of Americans would be living in four huge megalopolis and 28 percent in other large cities by the 21st century Kotz predicted, relaying figures similar to what federal officials had used in the late 1960s.⁴²

Kotz sought to see real action behind rural development rhetoric. Rural life would continue to be eroded as rural migration continued and urban areas would continue to suffer from congestion, pollution, welfare problems, crime and a "whole catalogue of central city ills." In response to this vision of the future, he acknowledged, the federal government in the 1960s undertook measures to stimulate the survival of the small farm and the small towns of America. Indeed, politicians and presidents had come up with new programs and new rhetoric to "save" the small towns and the small farms of the

⁴¹ See, for example, William Chapman, "Rural America: The Exodus Continues," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1971. Chapman chronicled the decline of farming communities in Kansas, where many local businesses, such as local groceries and goods stores, were dependent on more localized agriculture and the presence of farm labor. While the state of Kansas gained population over the 1960s, it was only in metropolitan areas; the rural population dropped from 849,870 in 1960 to 761,708 in 1970. Today only the "very prosperous" survived in Kansas agriculture, those who raised their own cattle or who had "crop acreages large enough to turn a profit." Until the 1950s, the medium-sized farm could flourish by grazing cattle on contract and utilizing their tall-growing "Bluestem" grasslands. Owners would ship in cattle from Texas and even Mexico and farmers would fatten them on their grasslands, then ship them to slaughter in Kansas City. Now, the fattening was done in huge feed lots—"pens where thousands of head of cattle are branded, dehorned, castrated, and fed corn, hay and grain in large troughs." It took only about 120 days to fatten cattle this way, less than half the time a farmer needed to fatten cattle on his grasslands fifteen years before. For those growing wheat, small farms struggled to compete with the larger farms and went out of business. Often the children of these farm families left the community never to return.

⁴² Nick Kotz, "U.S. Policy Handcuffs Small Farmer," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1971. The first article in the three-part series, which included "Agribusiness Threatens Family Farm," and "Conglomerates Reshape Food Supply," October 3, 1971.

country. There had been in recent years the emergence of "wars on poverty," "rural development" schemes, and the concept of "balanced national growth." Ultimately, however, in Kotz's estimation, the "powerful and impersonal forces of corporate agriculture" had been the dominant factors in changing the farm economy and U.S. Department of Agriculture policies had supported these forces more than any others. The last three presidents had talked in generalities about the need for rural development and population balance, but the nation would have to bring more than "political rhetoric" to the concept of rural development, which, in his mind, was "being served up as a magical alternative for those displaced from agriculture," for any meaningful reform to occur.⁴³

It was time for fundamental land reform in America, argued Peter Barnes in the *New Republic*. It was hard for people in cities to appreciate the need for land reform in the United States because "most of us have been so cut off from the land that, through ignorance, we accept present landholding patterns as desirable or inevitable. They are neither." The concentration of landholdings in agriculture were not necessarily more efficient, were not as environmentally friendly and contributed to the decline of community life in rural America. Protection of the environment, argued Barnes, tended to be less of a concern to large corporations than to small farmers who lived on their land and hoped to pass it down to the next generation. Moreover, small-scale agriculture lent itself more readily to biological pest control than did large-scale monoculture, a technique that "must increasingly be adopted if we are to avoid ecological disaster." There was little to be said for large landholdings on social or environmental grounds,

⁴³ Nick Kotz, "Revolutionary Changes in the Nation's Largest Business," *The Washington Post*, November 29, 1971.

concluded Barnes, and they were not inevitable. Land concentration in America, particularly in the South and West, was not the result of "inscrutable historical forces," but of a "long train of government policies, sometimes in the form of action, often of inaction."⁴⁴

Rural renewal would result from reforming agricultural land use policy—a belief at the heart of postwar conservation policy. More than ever, urban America needed a "safety valve," as Freeman had iterated. Barnes supported the idea of building new communities on rural lands, but argued it was much more important to revive existing rural communities, and to do so by enabling great numbers of people to live decently on the land. "There is no shortage of people who want to remain on the land, or return to it, if they could do so at higher than a subsistence level," Barnes anticipated. Fundamentally, American land policy should have as its highest priority the building of a society in which human beings could achieve dignity. This included the easing of "present social ills, both rural and urban, and the creation of a lasting economic base for democracy," preserving the beauty of the land, and producing abundant food.⁴⁵

To achieve these goals, Barnes advocated making small-scale agriculture economically viable again through elimination of favors bestowed on large farms, including crop subsidies. If subsidies were continued, they should be used to stabilize farm income only, and weighted in favor of smallness. Once small-scale farming was made viable, Barnes then recommended the redistribution of land by the federal government. Finally, new policies needed to be directed toward preserving and

⁴⁴ Peter Barnes, "Why America Needs Land Reform," *The New Republic*, reprinted in *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1971.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

conserving the beauty of the land. Zoning rural lands only for agriculture or new towns would help to contain suburban sprawl, and ease the pressure on small farmers to sell to developers or speculators.⁴⁶

In addition, farm loans needed to be greatly expanded so new farmers could get started in agriculture, farming cooperatives encouraged through tax laws and credit programs, and research funds currently spent on developing machinery for large-scale farming needed to be rechanneled into extension programs for small farmers and co-ops. It would not be easy to enact these reforms, Barnes anticipated, because “friends of agribusiness” were strategically scattered throughout the Agriculture, Interior and Appropriations committees of Congress as well as in the Nixon administration. But, gradually many “citizens and public officials are coming to realize that rural America ought to be revived, cities salvaged,” and welfare roles reduced. Furthermore, environmentalists who had long pointed toward the dangers of intensive agriculture and the need for “prudent” land-use were finding an audience. All of this pointed toward real and critical land reform in the United States.⁴⁷

At the end of the day, these debates over rural land use and rural development asked Americans to think about what kind of future they wanted, what kind of landscape they desired, and how the nation’s resources should be used to craft that future. What, in other words, should federal conservation policy prioritize? What kind of agriculture and communities did Americans want? West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Gus Douglass asked these questions in 1969 as he contemplated the future of West Virginia;

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

he had good reason to ask them given the circumstances of his state. Because the vast majority of farms had to remain small and modern machinery had limited function due to the mountainous topography of West Virginia, state leaders had attempted various programs and policies during the 1950s and 1960s to keep the state's small-scale agriculture alive, including a state-sponsored farm recreation program and state-sponsored farmers' markets for West Virginia farmers' goods. The state had made concerted efforts toward trying to save and support small-scale agriculture and to meet the demands of what the state Extension Service had called "an unprecedented agricultural and social revolution" in rural America.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "Publications and Information," 1957 *Plan of Work*, 266, West Virginia University, West Virginia Collection, Agricultural Extension Service, Director's Reports Call No. A&M no. 1534, Box 2. In an effort to stimulate its economy and offset declines in major industrial sectors such as mining and traditional agriculture, leaders in West Virginia began to increasingly focus on the potential of the state's scenic wonders and natural beauty. This focus became more intensified as the state celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1963. West Virginia provides an interesting state companion to federal conservation initiatives on America's farms in the realm of agricultural land-use adjustment toward outdoor recreation. As part of the 1963 centennial promotion of the state, West Virginia began a "Progress in Agriculture Centennial 63" campaign which initiated a concerted farm recreation program based around vacation farms and income-producing on-farm hunting and fishing. To enact the vacation farm program and support a growing farm recreation industry more generally, the West Virginia Rural Areas Development (RAD) committee established the Vacation Farm Committee and the West Virginia Farm and Home Electrification Council established the Tourist-Farms Vacations Committee. In the summer of 1963, then West Virginia's Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture, Gus Douglass, reached out to the USDA and shared information about the state's farm vacation program. Freeman responded enthusiastically, stating, "Your State has set a pattern in this field of assisting farm families in the development of recreational enterprises to augment their income. This is an inspiration to the Rural Areas Development staff here in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and they are telling about your commendable work, far and wide (Orville Freeman to Gus Douglass, 13 August 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, June 26-Oct. 28"). John Baker had similar praise: "Your pioneer leadership in developing recreational facilities in beautiful West Virginia is an inspiration to officials in other states and to those of us who are directly concerned with the Federal program of Rural Areas Development (John Baker to John T. Johnson, Commissioner of Agriculture, 13 August 1963, NA RG 16, Box 4010, Folder, "Recreation Program, June 26-Oct. 28"). West Virginia promoted a vacation farm program and "Sportsman Accommodations Program on Farms," along with a "Heartland, West Virginia," promotional campaign begun in 1965 that advertised the state's rural and outdoor heritage and its place as the "heartland" of the East ("Heartland, West Virginia" brochure, 1965, West Virginia Department of Agriculture, West Virginia State Archives). The "heartland" of the East, West Virginia offered suburban and urban visitors the Mountain State Art and Craft Fair, the Black Walnut Festival, homemade molasses, wood sculptures, the Mountain State Forest Festival, local

These efforts included conservation initiatives. Reflecting the multiple-use ideology, economic improvement goals and growing concerns about environmental amenities such as natural beauty that had driven federal conservation programs in the 1960s, Douglass asserted that "They [city folk] will have to realize that proper land use is the only way we can guarantee a high quality environment for future living in this great nation...Recreational needs, wildlife, mental health and scenic beauty could all be provided for through the reservation of 'extra' agricultural acres under a multiple-use concept." He called for protection of agriculture's resources and an understanding of its relationship to the broader nation. It seemed unfortunate to Douglass that agriculture's relationship with other segments of society was often forgotten or disregarded. Planners frequently considered only the immediate returns through development of agricultural resources, "rather than a long-term and lasting gain through careful planning and multiple use of these acres. It would seem that all levels of government should be involved in

beekeepers, golf, hunting, fishing, state parks and scenic highways. The state-sponsored farm recreation program lasted until at least until 1977 according to records in the state archives.

In addition to these efforts, the state sponsored five farmers' markets by 1964 and in the 1970s the West Virginia Department of Agriculture published a series of "Consumer Guides" in an effort to promote various agricultural goods that the state's farms could successfully market, such as peaches, strawberries and honey. The department also published a "how-to" guide on "Building a Roadside Market" so that growers could sell their home-grown produce directly to consumers. ("Building a Roadside Market," brochure, West Virginia Department of Agriculture, West Virginia State Archives). All of these efforts resemble initiatives of current local agricultural movements and in many ways the state of West Virginia, out of economic necessity, foreshadowed the current local agriculture movement.

As with federal conservation policy and rural development initiatives that attempted to integrate rural, suburban and urban needs into the development of natural resource policies, the West Virginia Rural Areas Development Committee advised that solutions to rural land use problems in the state be correlated with "employment and development programs in urban and industrial areas...Programs that provide resource needs should be blended into an over-all multiple use concept that will give stature to the orderly development of both rural and urban needs. It cannot be done on a piecemeal nor an independent basis" (West Virginia Natural Resources Committee, "Horizon Committee Report on Natural Resources," prepared for and approved by the State Rural Areas Development Committee, November 1964, West Virginia State Archives, Camp Washington Carver Collection). Today tourism, most of it based on the state's natural resources, is West Virginia's number one industry.

helping to determine the future use of land, our most valuable natural resource.”⁴⁹

Indeed, the search for long-term, not short-term, conservation of land resources and the emphasis on careful planning defined postwar conservation’s new directions.

Agriculture and conservation held positions of supreme importance in the “industrial age.” Agriculture was not a “rough, stony island that rises unimportantly in a beautiful blue sea of industrial enterprise,” but this was the picture that one received from reading newspaper articles about the upcoming 1970’s, Douglass mused. Americans were being told that there was insufficient time to make intelligent choices and that agriculture, forestry and conservation were not values worthy of mention—this was to the nation’s detriment. Conserving the agricultural heritage of the state was essential, particularly if people wanted to enjoy its benefits. “Much of our uniqueness stems from agricultural operations which break the monotony of mile after mile of uncared for woodland. The rustic homestead, the beautiful mountain pasture, the colorful barn are all assets for those seeking the tourist dollar and it takes hard, dedicated work to maintain them.”⁵⁰ Conserving the natural beauty of the state went hand in hand with eradicating the ugliness of poverty and providing the most benefits for the most people.

Those who worked in agriculture had always been on the front lines of conservation. “In conservation activities, agriculturists are the doers—we always have been, we are now and we always will be. Agriculture, including our growing of trees as a crop, provides our beautiful country side, our unpolluted watersheds, most of our outdoor

⁴⁹ Gus Douglass, “The Shape of Agriculture in West Virginia,” 4 November 1969, speech given at the 50th annual West Virginia Farm Bureau meeting, *Douglass Comments on Agriculture, 1969*, West Virginia State Archives.

⁵⁰ Gus Douglass, “Agriculture is not an Island,” 1 February 1970, *Douglass Comments on Agriculture, 1970*, West Virginia State Archives.

recreation, and of course, the necessary habitat for fish and game,” Douglass asserted. Agrarian and land conservation success was essential to the future of West Virginia, to not only to its economy, but its culture and character. The same was true, Douglass believed, for the entire nation. Indeed, as managers of a large part of the out-of-doors, “agriculturists and foresters know that their future is the State’s and Nation’s future.”⁵¹

The 1972 Rural Development Act

In August 1972, President Nixon signed the Rural Development Act. The Act was the means to fulfill the Congress’ commitment to “a sound balance between rural and urban America” and its overall purpose was to provide for “improving the economy and living conditions in rural America.”⁵² Title I of the Act renamed the Consolidated Farmers Home Administration Act of 1961 the “Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act,” reflecting the expanding purview of the USDA. This title expanded the scope of several existing programs and added new programs of loans and grants for rural industrialization, the expansion of business enterprises and essential community facilities. These facilities included community centers, firehouses, health care centers and recreation centers. All of these programs could be made available to communities of up to 10,000 people and towns of up to 50,000 people could apply for industrial loans. Titles II and III expanded the scope of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act and the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program. Title IV initiated a new pilot program for rural community fire protection and Title V authorized

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Subcommittee on Rural Development, U.S. Senate, *1976 Revised Guide to the Rural Development Act of 1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976), 1.

money on a formula basis to institutions of higher education for research and extension service projects on rural development and small farms. Title VI, "Miscellaneous," contained numerous provisions related to conservation, including amendments to Soil Conservation Service programs and Agricultural Conservation Program initiatives, now called the Rural Environmental Protection program. Building on the development of John A. Baker's position as Assistant Secretary of Rural Development and Conservation during the 1960s, this title also provided for a new or additional Assistant Secretary position within the USDA for rural development.⁵³

In terms of jurisdiction and control, Title VI officially gave the Secretary of Agriculture the primary responsibility for rural development within the Executive Branch, including the responsibility to advise the President, other agencies and Congress. It initiated a new mandatory responsibility for the Department of Agriculture to establish national goals for all elements of rural community development, report annually to Congress on progress, and to coordinate all federal activity toward the attainment of those goals in cooperation with state and local efforts.⁵⁴ Title VI also added "rural development" as a basic mission of the Department of Agriculture and amended the department's organic legislation to reflect this addition. In this way, the passage of the Rural Development Act of 1972 "ushered in a new era of Federal rural development policy, one that explicitly designated rural development as a Federal policy goal with specific purposes and programs." Ultimately, the Act offered little in the way of new

⁵³ Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, U.S. Senate, *Rural Development Legislation As Amended By the Rural Development Act of 1972, Analysis and Explanation* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972), 1; Roth, "The Nixon Administration," 4. In 1966, President Johnson officially designated the Secretary of Agriculture to be in charge of all rural development activities at the federal level by executive order.

⁵⁴ *Rural Development Legislation*, 1.

programs or money, but did acknowledge the development of rural areas as a national goal, even though that goal had as much to do with the belief that rural out-migration contributed to the growing distress in America's cities as with national concern about conditions of the countryside as a problem in itself.⁵⁵

Postwar conservation programs comprised an important part of the Rural Development Act of 1972. Title I of the Act, which amended the Farmers Home Administration legislation from 1961, included "Rural Enterprise Loans" targeted at establishing businesses to supplement farm income. To be eligible for these particular loans, which included recreation enterprise uses, such as camping and swimming, tennis, riding stables, vacation cottages, boating, nature trails, picnic areas as well as service industries such as roadside markets, small grocery stores and service stations, the applicant had to have a farming background (except for veterans) and after the loan was made continue to be an owner-operator of a family farm that would generate the majority of his or her income. This stipulation stood in contrast to the Farmers Home Administration loan programs, which had been amended in 1968 to not require that the farmer remain in farming after the loan was made. The "Rural Enterprise Operating Loans" could also be used to develop recreation enterprises on farms, as well as for other farm uses, such as the purchase of livestock, bees or other farm animals. Title I also included the "Community Facility Loans," which provided resources for communities to develop and improve facilities providing "essential services." Those services included

⁵⁵ Roth, "The Nixon Administration," 5.

fire and rescue services, transportation, community, social, cultural and recreational benefits and industrial development.⁵⁶

Title III of the Rural Development Act broadened the Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) program and focused on land conservation and utilization, with an emphasis on creating a "pleasing environment." The grants authorized for the RC&D program were designed to "assist local people in initiating and carrying out [a] long-range program of resource conservation and development for purposes of achieving a dynamic rural community with satisfactory level of income and pleasing environment, and creating a favorable investment climate attractive to private capital."⁵⁷ Funds could be used for erosion control, flood prevention, farm irrigation, soil and water management, water quality management and for public recreation and fish and wildlife developments.

In addition, the new iterations of conservation ideology developed in the postwar years continued in other legislation that the USDA implemented. Programs administered by the Farmers Home Administration and developed during the 1960s continued into the 1970s, including the "Individual Recreation Enterprise Loans" which allowed farmers to convert their entire farms to income-producing, on-farm recreation enterprises. Farm Ownership and Operating Loans also provided means for farmers to establish nonfarm enterprises to supplement farm income, as well as support to improve traditional farming business and implement multiple-uses of private lands.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ 1976 Revised Guide, 27.

⁵⁷ 1976 Revised Guide, 33.

⁵⁸ 1976 Revised Guide, 49-51.

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Postwar conservation ideology continued in the 1970s in institutional, programmatic and legislative capacities. But, by the mid-1970s, the issues and the broader the political culture that had incited the new dimensions of postwar conservation in the mid 1950s and 1960s—rural poverty, concerns over quality of life and the creation of the Great Society, development of harmonious communities, loss of outdoor recreation space, agricultural surplus, the urban crisis and rural-urban imbalance—either continued without resolution or faded as other crises and issues took center stage. With the global economic and energy crisis of 1973-4 and the onset of hard times, Americans no longer focused on what to do with excess leisure time outside, but instead on how to work enough to pay the bills. Environmental concerns shifted from a widespread focus on the preservation of outdoor space and outdoor recreation to human health, toxins and ecological wellbeing. The attempt to truly craft the good life and make the Great Society were no longer federal priorities and neither was a highly publicized national attack on poverty. The American public no longer supported such ambitious federal agendas, particularly after the Watergate scandal, the loss of Vietnam and the public's general loss of faith in government leadership. Instead, America experienced a conservative backlash against the liberalism of the 1960s and a weariness of the tumult and division experienced in American life by the late 1960s.

In the agricultural world, the focus shifted from a surplus crisis to a potential food scarcity crisis as widespread crop failures in 1970 and 1971 led to a tightening in the

world grain market. Indeed, the problem of agricultural overproduction and the idea that millions of acres would no longer be needed for traditional agricultural production was one important causal force in shaping USDA postwar conservation policies. In the early 1970s, that calculus disappeared and so did talk of any surplus problem. Instead, talk surrounded the fear of not having enough agricultural acres to meet global and national food demands. In response to these global developments, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz lifted production controls and encouraged maximum production from America's farmers, declaring they should plant "fencerow to fencerow." Farmers brought back into production acres that had been left idle, planting 25 million more acres in 1974 than in 1972 and increasing throughout the decade.⁵⁹

This concern over food scarcity, having enough productive agricultural acres and the end of the surplus era helped to motivate a movement to preserve farmland acres in the 1970s. In addition to concern over food scarcity, the farmland preservation movement of the 1970s arose from a separate critique of modern agriculture as a social and ecological failure that built on the growing environmental movement. Environmentalists sought to conserve and preserve agricultural acres in an ecologically-minded way, as opposed to just for production purposes. The national farmland preservation movement, writes historian Tim Lehman, served "as a first attempt at an environmental focus on agriculture." Attempts to create federal farmland preservation legislation died in Congress, but the movement initiated a policy dialogue between environmentalists and agriculturalists that resulted in the conservation title of the 1985

⁵⁹ Lehman, *Public Values, Private Lands*, 60-2.

Food Security Act. Recognizing that the expansion of the 1970s had been a disaster for soil erosion, this Act created the Conservation Reserve Program, through which the USDA could contract with farmers to remove highly erodible lands from cultivation for 10-15 years and which emphasized erosion control.⁶⁰

The 1970s farmland preservation movement's goals shared much in common with the postwar conservation measures developed in the 1950s and 1960s, especially as it concerned keeping agricultural lands intact. These developments had overlapping goals, though they came from different motivating factors. Like postwar conservation, farmland preservation was a product of its time. It was motivated by concerns of the 1970s: an emerging awareness of and concern for the resource scarcity and the ecological instability and growing range of environmental problems associated with modern agriculture. Unlike postwar conservation, the farmland preservation movement did not concern itself with surplus, outdoor recreation resources, multiple-use or issues of rural poverty and economic opportunity for individuals and communities—with rural development.

U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation and its postwar developments remained part of the USDA mission and agenda across many fronts, but many of the issues that postwar conservation had sought to address had lost their high-profile by the mid-1970s. Despite this reality, the new directions in conservation ideology that were forged through the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the late 1950s and 1960s continued to influence federal conservation policy and the ways in which rural American lands were

⁶⁰ Lehman, *Public Values, Private Lands*, 158, 162-3.

used in the years to come. They shaped the contours of modern America, both on the land and the ideological relationship between Americans and the nation's rural spaces.

Conclusion: The Evolving Conservation Ideal: Continuity and Change, Progress and Identity

This project is a story about the significance and changing dimensions of federal conservation policy in America after World War II. It focuses on one component of federal conservation policy in the postwar years: conservation programs for private lands administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA postwar conservation policy both built upon and diverged from a foundation established during the Progressive and New Deal eras, implementing traditional wise-use, utilitarian conservation ideology in new ways that leaders believed would resolve dilemmas Americans faced and shape a better future. Historical explorations of the relationship between Americans and the natural world after World War II have been dominated by the rise of modern environmentalism and public lands, and this dissertation has aimed to demonstrate that traditional wise-use conservation policy also shaped the American landscape, guided Americans' relationship with the natural world in new directions, evolved to embrace new values in American life and influenced broader political aims in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

This is also a story about rural America and its relationship to an urban nation. It is about a working landscape of private, agricultural lands directed toward new, sometimes unusual uses for multiple purposes. The development of these new land uses operated within a set of cultural assumptions about the meaning and purpose of the farm and rural life during a time when more Americans than ever were migrating from farms to metropolitan areas. This project explores another chapter of the longstanding and

continuing tension in American history between progress and tradition. Conservation policy in the postwar years was intimately interwoven with the evolution of modern rural development policy as it emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s and with federal visions of what rural America should look like and the role its natural resources could play in a modern, urban nation. This investigation of conservation policy focuses new attention on rural America and its relationship to urban America in the postwar years, subjects that deserve more scholarly attention.

As the previous chapters have shown, leaders in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s adapted older conservation policies and programs to meet the needs of postwar America, in the process shaping the direction of the nation and the ideology of conservation policy. Two developments in the 1950s laid the foundation for new directions in federal conservation policy: the increasing dominance of large-scale, mechanized agriculture and increased national interest in outdoor recreation. Conservation policies developed and implemented by the USDA from the late 1950s through the early 1970s adapted approaches of their predecessors, including, for example, the multiple use of natural resources ideology. Postwar conservation policy also diverged from its predecessors by 1) applying the multiple-use doctrine previously only applied to public resources to private lands; 2) applying conservation practices to the challenges of urban America and seeking to guide new relationships between city and country; and 3) adapting wise-use conservation practices to achieve goals and support values usually attributed by historians to modern environmentalism: emphasizing and protecting natural beauty, achieving a high "quality of life" and seeking harmony and interdependence with nature.

USDA leaders forged these new dimensions of conservation policy to guide massive transformations in American life, improve society and meet postwar administrations' goals. These goals included alleviating rural poverty; providing ample outdoor recreation space for an increasingly outdoor recreation and leisure-conscious American public; curbing excessive agricultural surplus; achieving balance between rural and urban America; curing urban ills, such as overcrowding; and supporting environmental amenities that contributed to the good life. These goals expanded over the course of nearly twenty years, from focusing on the problems of farmers and rural communities in the 1950s to more forcefully attacking rural poverty and addressing outdoor recreation resources management in the early 1960s, to broadly addressing diverse issues in all American communities, including cities by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Conservation programs comprised a key part of expanding rural development agendas over the same period.

Orville Freeman, Secretary of Agriculture under Kennedy and Johnson, was central to shaping USDA postwar conservation policy. He and his advisors, including Willard Cochrane and John A. Baker, seized upon the rural development efforts of the 1950s and pushed a conservation land-use adjustment agenda that, among other things, advocated farm recreation. The 1962 Food and Agriculture Act authorized this agenda. After President Kennedy's death, rural and agricultural conservation programs continued to grow and evolve, becoming part of the War on Poverty and contributing to the realization of the Great Society. Conservation programs targeted a broad, ambitious vision of liberal reform, seeking ways to transcend becoming just a rich and productive

society to becoming a great one, which included leisure time for reflection, the desire for beauty and hunger for community. During the Johnson years, conservation ideology further expanded to address the urban crisis, targeting the revitalization of rural America to make it a more attractive place to live and ease the population pressure on America's cities. Driven by a belief that rural outmigration to cities was stressing America's urban centers to the breaking point, Freeman and other leaders argued rural America provided the answer to rural-urban imbalance and urban woes. This concern over rural-urban imbalance continued into the Nixon years, shaping the creation of the 1972 Rural Development Act and other legislation and programs dealing with rural conservation.

By the mid-1970s, some of the issues that had incited and influenced the development of postwar USDA conservation policy either continued without resolution or faded as other problems took precedence. The urban crisis no longer gripped the nation. The two-decade postwar economic boom came to an end, replaced by a global economic crisis that focused Americans not on what to do with excess leisure time outside, but on how to work enough to pay the bills. Concerns about the natural world shifted from a widespread focus on outdoor space and recreation to human health, toxins and ecological wellbeing. The American public, weary of the tumult of the 1960s, no longer supported the ambitious liberal reform agendas of the time, and the vision of the Great Society faded amidst a conservative backlash. In the agricultural world, the focus shifted from a surplus problem, which had been critical to the development of postwar conservation programs, to a food scarcity crisis and the lifting of production controls on agricultural acres.

While these developments defined the 1970s, the USDA continued to implement new conservation programs established after World War II throughout the decade and the expansion and transformation of conservation ideology that had occurred endured. These programs continued through the Rural Development Act of 1972 and loan programs administered by the Farmers Home Administration, such as the Individual Recreation Enterprise Loans, Farm Ownership Loans and Farm Operating Loans; the Soil Conservation Service, such as the Soil and Water Conservation and Plant Materials for Conservation programs; and the Agricultural Conservation Program administered through the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.¹ Over the course of more than twenty years, from the mid 1950s through the 1970s, these programs affected millions of acres and helped reshape conservation ideology and the rural landscape. While all of the postwar conservation programs developed from the mid 1950s and throughout the 1960s, such as the farm recreation programs, did not endure as they were originally conceived, the ideology behind the new directions in postwar conservation policy continued to influence USDA conservation ideology and Americans' approaches to managing private, working lands.

The period from 1955 to 1972 marked an ideological expansion in conservation policy. On agricultural lands, conservation ideology expanded from traditional soil conservation for the purposes of food and fiber production to the multiple-use concept that agricultural lands produced other valuable amenities and commodities for society. New "quality of life" standards of living that developed after World War II influenced

¹ Subcommittee on Rural Development, U.S. Senate, *1976 Revised Guide to the Rural Development Act of 1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976), 49-51, 52-53, 55.

wise-use conservation programs beginning in the late 1950s. This concern with quality of life, among other factors that this project explores, affected the direction of policy. While more traditional soil conservation ideology dating from the 1920s and 1930s remains active today, so too does the expanded ideological legacy of the postwar years. In 1997, the Chief of the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS—formerly the Soil Conservation Service), Paul W. Johnson, promoted the importance of conserving the health of the nation's private lands for the broader health of an urban society. In so doing, he made a statement with which Orville Freeman would have heartily agreed: "A land comprised of wilderness islands at one extreme and urban islands at the other, with vast food and fiber factories in between, does not constitute a geography of hope." Private lands "need not be devoted to a single-purpose enterprise," Johnson argued. "With a broader understanding of land and our place within the landscape, our Nation's farms, ranches, and private forest land can and do serve the multiple functions that we and all other life depend on." These multiple functions included not only soil health for the production of traditional agricultural commodities, but also ecological health, wildlife conservation and the protection of environmental amenities.²

The NRCS report to which Johnson contributed acknowledged that the nation's farms produced other important commodities for the nation beyond food and fiber—what True D. Morse and 1960s USDA promotional materials would have called new "crops" for the farm. The report did not mention outdoor recreation frequently, only when

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, *America's Private Land: A Geography of Hope* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 4-5.

referencing hunting and fishing on private lands. The high-priority national concern over outdoor recreation resources that drove many aspects of conservation policy in the 1950s and 1960s was gone. But the report did focus on the environmental amenities or other “goods and services” produced by America’s farms. Farmers and ranchers, as stewards of the majority of America’s land, had the ability to produce safe drinking water, clear-flowing streams, lakes filled with fish and scenic landscapes. Farmers conserved through their stewardship and practices “environmental commodities” that many Americans—rural, urban, and suburban—valued. Most Americans, the report concluded, “support policies and programs to help private landowners conserve natural resources and produce traditional as well as nontraditional products of the land.”³ How farmers and ranchers used and managed their land was “key to producing the nontraditional agricultural commodities that people value, and to maintaining healthy, stable landscapes and watersheds.”⁴ While the commodities discussed in 1997 were not exactly the same as those discussed in 1967, the basic conviction that America’s farms and rural lands produced multiple products beyond food and fiber that *all* Americans valued and needed remained a working conservation philosophy at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Indeed current conservation and rural development programs administered through the USDA both build on and diverge from postwar developments in conservation ideology. Just as leaders during the postwar years adapted older conservation traditions to meet and shape the current times, so too have leaders adapted conservation policy since the 1970s to meet policy priorities and perceived problems of the time. The

³ Ibid, 8.

⁴ Ibid, 21.

outdoor recreation focus in agricultural conservation is much more limited today, though conservation programs and the rural development mission still target recreation. Farmers can no longer receive funds to convert agricultural lands to golf courses, and recreational facilities are no longer considered "essential" community facilities. The Resource, Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) that Freeman had so admired, however, is still active.⁵ Conservation programs today, in addition to making traditional agriculture more productive and environmentally sustainable, emphasize the wise use of natural resources conservation practices to achieve environmental and ecological goals and the conservation of agrarian heritage and life. The use of federal policy and programs to sustain an agrarian landscape that contains these higher "quality of life" amenities builds on the expansion of conservation ideology after World War II.

Unlike the 1960s and 1970s programs, and the motivations that shaped them, however, current federal programs seeking to achieve these aims consider them "nonmarket" benefits, i.e., benefits people would likely not pay for. Increased farmer income is not a directly stated goal of current conservation programs that facilitate the development and protection of nontraditional agricultural "products." As in the postwar period, however, certain conservation programs today target long-term conservation agendas. Examples of current conservation programs include Agricultural Land Protection Programs, such as the Farmland Protection Program, which provides financial and technical assistance to purchase long-term agreements or easements on farmland and grassland to protect it from conversion to other uses and the Grassland Reserve Program,

⁵ Current description of the RC&D program can be found in Title II, "Conservation," of the 2008 Farm Bill (Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-246, 122 Stat. 1816-17 (2008)).

which assists owners, through long-term rental agreements or easements, to restore grassland and conserve virgin grassland while still maintaining areas for livestock grazing and hay production.⁶ Working Land Programs that provide financial and technical assistance to improve conservation efforts on lands in production include the Conservation Stewardship Program, which provides payments to producers to adopt or maintain a wide range of conservation management and land-based structural practices that address one more resources of concern, such as soil, water or wildlife habitat and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.⁷ This latter program, originally established in the 1985 Food Security Act, provides grants to state and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch and forest land to voluntarily make land available for public access for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting or fishing under state or tribal programs.⁸

In terms of rural development policy more broadly, the USDA no longer makes connections between conservation, improving farmer income and alleviating rural poverty with the intensity and clarity with which it made them during the 1960s, though rural development programs continue to focus on the original mission of revitalization of rural communities and creating economic opportunity in rural America. Unlike in the 1960s and early 1970s, the USDA no longer links this goal of rural revitalization to any concern over rural-urban imbalance or urban crowding, though as the continuation of National Farm-City week demonstrates, federal efforts to connect rural and urban

⁶ Ibid, "Subtitle E—Farmland Protection and Grassland Reserve," 1776-85.

⁷ Ibid, "Subtitle D—Conservation Stewardship Program," 1768-76.

⁸ Ibid, "Subtitle G—Other Conservation Programs of the Food Security Act of 1985," 1796. For a description of all conservation programs under Title II of the 2008 Farm Bill, see this online guide from the USDA: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/FarmBill/2008/Titles/TitleIIConservation.htm>.

America continue. The rural development mission of the USDA currently targets six areas to create growth and opportunity in rural America through loan programs and technical assistance. These areas, as far as conservation is concerned, demonstrate both continuity and evolution from the postwar conservation agenda. They reflect the current movement toward local and more sustainable farming, as well as new technological developments, and include expanding broadband access, promoting renewable energy, increasing agricultural exports, taking advantage of ecosystem markets, capitalizing on outdoor recreation, and linking local farm production to local consumption.⁹

The changing meanings and uses of farmlands in America, and the effort to conserve and guide America's agrarian heritage are not only evident in federal conservation policy, but are also found in burgeoning private-sector agritourism, non-profit organizations such as the American Farmland Trust and state policies that support nontraditional agricultural production, agritourism and farmland preservation. Indeed, public policy efforts to encourage the direct consumption of rural life that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s are in full swing. The University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, as just one example, produces a virtual "Connecticut Farm Map" for the State Department of Agriculture, which serves as a "Guide to Connecticut's Agricultural Destinations." Visitors can go to a farmers' market or sip Connecticut wines, all while boosting the local farm economy and enjoying "open space." The "commodity groups" listed by the State Department of Agriculture include agritourism, which offers visitors a "great opportunity for an up-close Connecticut farm

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, *2009 Progress Report* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2009), 3.

experience” by visiting a working dairy farm, or taking a wagon ride at a buffalo farm; Christmas trees; farmers’ markets; farm stands; wineries; honey; and ice-cream.¹⁰ The West Virginia Department of Agriculture’s *Food & Things* Producer Guide and Directory lists diverse specialty goods produced on and around West Virginia’s farms. These include bakery goods, herbs and spices, orchard products, snack foods, syrups, wines, candy and candles, among other goods.¹¹ The West Virginia Farmland Protection Act, passed in 2000, aims to sustain farming communities, curb urban expansion and the spread of urban blight, protect agricultural and woodland land as open space, enhance tourism and protect “worthwhile community values, institutions and landscapes which are inseparably associated with traditional farming.”¹²

The ideology of conservation policy after World War II as developed through the USDA and applied to private lands provides broader insights into American life and identity as well. Postwar conservation ideology embodied many tensions and cultural assumptions that remain with us today. During the immediate postwar years, agriculture underwent massive transformations, forever altering the agricultural landscape and rural life. USDA policies heavily supported the development of large-scale industrial agriculture and agribusiness, while at the same time Department officials publicly lamented the loss of family farms and agrarian heritage. Indeed, concern and debate over the agricultural landscape, the family farm and rural culture accompanied the rise of modern agricultural development and the “miracle” of progress that American agriculture

¹⁰ <http://www.ctfarms.uconn.edu/commodities.html#Agritourism>

¹¹ West Virginia Department of Agriculture, *Food & Things*, http://www.wvagriculture.org/Foods_and_Things.htm

¹² <http://www.wvfarmlandprotection.org/>. This act amended a 1982 statute that allowed the creation of Farmland Preservation Committees.

represented during these years. While proclaiming American agriculture as an example to the world, officials questioned that very progress, and worried over the negative consequences of success, which included social disruption, poverty and lost connections between Americans and the land. Certain USDA officials sensed the dark side of progress would also have long-term consequences and to varying degrees exhibited both admiration and discomfort with modern agriculture's trends. This fundamental tension between implementing certain understandings of progress and ambivalence over the costs of that progress remains powerful today, not only in agriculture, but in many aspects of American life.

A set of complex, sometimes competing motivations and goals guided postwar conservation policy on private lands. Policymakers designed the new directions in land use to solve business problems in farming, mainly the surplus crisis that plagued farming in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, these new initiatives targeted problems that commercial policy caused—the push toward mono-cropping, rural poverty, and the decline of medium to small scale farms. In the balance of power between subsidizing industrial agriculture, social justice and other rural development efforts, the business of farming emerged victorious.

Still, postwar conservation policy attempted to shape a complementary and alternative agricultural landscape that not only addressed issues in small farming but increasingly had to reconcile productivity with the environmental values that grew out of increased leisure time and an appreciation of the land and with urban needs. The agrarian landscape itself became a commodity to be consumed by urban and suburban Americans

and by the late 1960s a solution to urban woes. In creating programs that catered to this new and growing constituency, postwar conservation policy demonstrates the USDA's political motivations to remain relevant in an increasingly urban society. America's agricultural landscape reflects these motivations and is a product of all of these efforts; it is one with a dominant narrative, but is comprised of many stories and reflects multiple notions of "progress."

Postwar conservation policy shaped and guided America during a transformative time and important phase in the long-term identity of the nation. Its programs promoted the symbol of the idealized family farm that had deep roots in American culture as one of hope, attempting to conserve that landscape and agrarian vision for an American public that grew ever more distant from actual farming in the two decades after World War II. It promoted a vision of the family farm that the majority of farms in America did not resemble, a trend that continues today. Through its promotion and actual programs, postwar conservation policy helped to shape the ways in which the majority of Americans interacted with agrarian spaces, for the first time applying public policy to guide private lands toward new horizons that would meet the needs of the age. By the late 1960s, certain leaders believed these new land use and rural renewal efforts were essential to saving the nation in light of urban problems. Conservation policy was, of course, not the only force guiding shifts in American land use and identity; the private sector capitalized on them as well, and in many ways postwar conservation policy reacted to transformations other public policies had helped to foment. These included large-scale

commercial farm programs, as well as airport, factory, housing and road subsidies—all of which competed for space on the land.

The new directions for American lands forged during the 1950s and which took root during the 1960s were also imbued with the vitality, hope, idealism and ambition of societal reform that occurred during that time. Underscoring postwar conservation ideology, in addition to *realpolitik* motivations, was the belief held by conservationists since the origins of the conservation movement, that by adjusting land, one could adjust society in productive, better ways—even if at times this belief was misguided or envisioned unrealistic goals. Though these new conservation measures, an improved society would emerge. Of course, the terms “better” and “improved” were (and remain) subjective, but the idea that one could reshape society through reshaping one’s relationship with the land remained powerful and compelling.

Today a new movement is underway to reshape the role of the farm in American life and Americans’ relationship with the agrarian experience. The current movement toward local and sustainable agriculture, which took off in the 2000s, is based upon a fundamental critique of the dominant modern agricultural system in the United States, which local food and agriculture supporters argue is unsustainable, unhealthy for both people and the wider environment, and unnecessarily expensive. The rise and triumph of the modern system of agriculture and agribusiness in the middle decades of the twentieth century resulted in social, economic, ecological, health and cultural crises, its critics charge. Americans are no longer connected to their food sources, have lost intimacy with the agrarian experience, and our society suffers on multiple levels as a result. At the

movement's core is the desire to support small-scale farmers, whose food is ideally consumed locally, keeping profits in the community and cutting down on agriculture's environmental footprint. This movement toward local and small-scale farming seeks to reconnect Americans to the land, produce healthier, more accessible food, support local communities, make the profession of farming viable for those who desire to pursue it, and create a more sustainable society—a better, if not great, society. It has found a wide following and is even receiving support from the USDA. The movement faces challenges and also holds promise.

The current local food and agriculture movement is attempting to reform a landscape and a system that has enjoyed decades of support from federal policies. As the current agricultural critique continues to grow, find traction, and offer creative solutions to pressing problems, it seems worth pointing out that it is in good historical company. It is important to remember that the landscape and broader culture it seeks to reshape emerged amidst controversy, conflict, concern, and hope. It is a landscape of many narratives. In its concern and passion for the fate of agricultural America, and those who depend on it, the local food and agriculture movement also has the backing of history.

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