CONSERVATION IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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I was most pleasantly surprised to find a concern with urban areas on the part of people interested in wildlife and wildlife management. My first thought was that those of you in charge of the program, from a reading of your newspapers, had come to the conclusion that there was more wildlife within the cities than outside of them and that it was high time attention was given to this aspect of the subject. However, this trend of thought did not seem to fit in very well with the idea of "conservation."

Then I remembered a monumental report prepared in 1937 by the National Resources Committee and entitled "Our Cities—Their Role in the National Economy." The cover of this report consisted of a map of the United States on which were a great number of dots, the area of each dot being in proportion to a city’s population and each dot being located on the city’s site. Naturally enough the cover suggested a new title for the report which was, "Our Cities—the Blots on the Nation’s Landscape."

It is these cities, these "blots on the landscape" that I am to discuss this morning in relation to conservation. When we think of conservation many of us think of the land; the city planner thinks primarily of land use or of putting the land to its best and most useful purpose.

Urban Land Use in the Nation

In the beginning it might be well to take a brief look at some over-all quantities. In 1950 the United States had a population of some 151,000,000 persons and of this 97 million or 64 per cent were classified as "urban." Based upon land use surveys our office has made of a number of metropolitan areas we would estimate that this urban population actually used some 22,500 square miles of land area for urban purposes—that is for all residential, commercial, industrial, public, institutional, streets, and other actual urban uses. This, however, was only eight-tenths of one percent of the nation’s land area.

Fifty years earlier—in 1900—the urban population of 30 million persons was only two-fifths of the nation’s total of 76 million. The total urban area occupied was probably in the vicinity of only 3500 square miles. Thus in fifty years the urban population tripled while the land area occupied increased six times.

We all know too well that these trends are increasing at an expanding rate. The nation is growing very rapidly; the growth is almost
entirely in urban areas. Of great significance also is the changed
caracter of urban growth with ever larger areas used for every urban
purpose. Our major streets and highways have rights-of-way of 200
to 300 feet instead of 80 or 100 feet. The one-story, single-family home
on the larger and larger lot, the shopping center with parking areas
measured by the acre, the industry with a site of half a square mile
are common and typical phenomena. More and more people are using
more and more land for urban purposes.

By the year 2000 our nation's population is likely to reach 275,000,-
000 persons with 85 per cent being urban in character. The per capita
use of urban land will at least double during the period from 1950 to
2000 and the 235 million urban inhabitants of the year 2000 may re-
quire as much as 82,000 square miles of urban land area. Even so this
will be only 2.8 per cent of the land area of the United States. How-
ever, this area becomes more significant when related to the total area
in cropland. In 1950 the total area in cropland was 640,000 square
miles or a little over 21 per cent of the nation's area, while the area
in Class I farmland which produces 20 per cent of crop values
amounted to 3.8 per cent of our total land area.

Thus from the very limited standpoint of land area occupied alone,
the urban uses are becoming significant.

In England we have seen the conflict between urban uses and a very
limited land area available for agriculture and have watched with
more or less academic interest the efforts of the British Government to
eliminate this conflict, never dreaming with our vast land area that we
should see such a conflict here. Instances of it are beginning to arise
in such places as the San Francisco Bay region in California where
subdivisions are pre-empting excellent agricultural lands. This is also
happening in Hawaii which has a most limited usable land area. In
several cities including Louisville and St. Louis excellent land for
truck gardening has been subdivided and probably unnecessarily. On
the fringes of many of our metropolitan areas provision of schools
alone for a few new subdivisions has so raised the local tax rate that
agricultural use is becoming uneconomic. Thus we too as a nation will
have conflicts between urban uses and other uses and will want to look
again at some of the British practices. Perhaps we can profit by their
experience and take action before it is too late.

Form of the Urban Area

The haphazard spilling-out of our urban areas over the countryside
with no form or pattern and no seeming sense or reason unquestion-
ably is the most disturbing, or most frightening, aspect of our present
day urban development. All of the experts on urban growth are unanimous in decrying this condition which they term the "urban sprawl." Only the fact that I am at home—not away from home—today and thus cannot qualify as an expert prevents me from joining them in this universal "viewing with alarm."

In Colonial times the urban area was circumscribed by the distance a man could walk—or ride a horse and buggy. Williamsburg and Charleston, South Carolina, are examples of this period. Then as the nineteenth century moved on transportation improvements occurred. St. Louis from where we are now to its city limits is a good example of the "street car city" occupying, generally, a radius of about five miles. This current century brought the automobile and an almost measureless area of urbanization. There is suburbia and then exurbia. It is not unusual to live 20 or 25 miles "out." But then a major industry or commercial establishment such as the Monsanto Chemical Company here in St. Louis may move 10 to 20 miles away from the downtown area and its worker may then move 20 to 30 miles beyond that. Where it will all end, no one knows.

Any tie to a public transportation system seems most tenuous insofar as our urban areas are concerned. The automobile has taken over almost completely. In most cases, however, urban commercial, industrial, and residential land uses do need public water and public sewers and, upon examination, the "urban sprawl" can be found tied together by a network of cast iron and ceramic pipes. In certain instances a combination of geology, topography, and intelligent urban planning and administration is bringing about urban areas with sensible and coherent forms. It must be admitted, however, that these are the exception, not the rule. Urban sprawl is the rule.

Within the foreseeable future urban development will no doubt be freed of the bonds of the public water and sewer systems. Already individual sewage disposal devices are being perfected. Individual water supply may be a more troublesome problem but with new power sources available it will be solved also. Then there will be no natural control over the form of the urban area whatsoever and all that will be left will be any arbitrary control exercised by planning and zoning agencies. Experience to date would not indicate that these would be too successful in such a drastic control, even though such control is needed and fully justified.

What will our urban areas look like if there is neither natural nor artificial control over their basic pattern?

During the last three years our office has been undertaking planning studies for several communities in the southwestern part of the
State of Michigan. Here, a sandy soil—perfect for septic tanks—and a high water table have made public water and sewer systems almost unnecessary. From an inspection of this area we can perhaps foresee the form of the future urban area—city, or community.

In this general region in Michigan any line between "urban" and "rural" has disappeared. New industries are found in rural areas. Residential uses of an urban character are found here and there along almost all of the rural roads. I doubt that there is a single farm family that does not receive a significant portion of its family income from urban employment by one or more members of the family. Seemingly rural townships have doubled or tripled in population in the past ten years. The suburban or exurban growth has gone so far that many cities have given up any attempt to extend city limits to keep up with it. While cities are growing too, they are growing much more slowly than the total community.

In this instance and from the inside looking out, the "urban sprawl" does not look half bad. In fact it looks pretty good. Planning and zoning measures are essential primarily to keep commercial uses, billboards and junk yards from scattering up and down all of the highways, and to insure an adequate character of residential use—to keep a few substandard houses or shacks from spoiling several square miles of countryside. These troublesome occurrences are frequent; most were located before the rural township governments caught on to what was happening.

To the new home owner locating in a rural or semi-rural part of this region there are significant advantages. These are important because they influence more families who seek the same thing. Families in such areas have plenty of light and air around their homes, large lots, associations with nature; they may raise animals or grow a large garden. They have a local—close to home—government on a school district or township basis, and reasonable taxes, particularly if a big new industry locates in their school district or township. Of course, public services are poor or missing and insurance rates are high but no family seems to mind that.

A complete dispersion of all our urban areas along the lines of the southwest Michigan prototype is not likely for many decades, perhaps another century. Some experts have predicted that the next two or three decades will see some 14 gigantic strip cities that will contain 80 per cent of our population. It would appear far more probable, however, that the result will be so great a dispersion as to cause the words "urban" and "rural," "city" and "country" to have but
little difference in meaning so that no one may ever know—or care—whether the 14 strip cities come into existence or not!

What will happen to our present urban areas in the future? The newer parts built at a low density with due regard for amenity and open space no doubt will remain because their amortized price and value will be competitive with new construction. Other parts, particularly those built at an abnormally high density such as the new public housing in St. Louis, and some of our intensively developed urban renewal projects, for example, will probably be cast aside and abandoned. The face of the globe carries the scars of many abandoned cities from other civilizations; there is no reason to suppose that some of ours will not suffer the same fate; certainly it will be a well deserved end for many of them. The cost of abandoning significant parts of our urban areas is not a severe obstacle; we could buy up and turn into farm land 1000 square miles per year of fully developed urban property for the amount we spend on national defense. If our urban areas do not measure up to our needs we will abandon them and cost will not stand in our way.

CONSERVATION WITHIN THE URBAN AREA

Let us turn now to a more detailed consideration of conservation within the urban area itself. Our cities furnish some inspiring examples of conservation, such as Rock Creek Park and the other parks in the District of Columbia, the mountain parks of Denver, the magnificent park system of Kansas City, Missouri, with its preservation of scenic values of bluffs and valleys, Stanley Park in Vancouver, the parks of Minneapolis—the list is almost endless.

Park systems that preserve areas of scenic interest, stream valleys, etc., are, of course, the most dramatic examples of urban conservation. Others that can be mentioned include the planting of trees, particularly street trees (most of our cities appear to be a forest from the air) and the large lot single-family residential subdivision that has been carefully adjusted to the topography. In some of these latter developments close in to the center of the city we frequently find numerous song birds, quail and sometimes pheasant, lots of rabbits and squirrels and occasionally a skunk or raccoon. Presence of such wildlife can be considered pretty much a seal of approval for the designer of such a subdivision development.

On the other side of the picture, the bulldozer probably symbolizes the negative aspect of urban conservation. To most developers the first step in any project apparently is to (1) cut down all the trees, and (2) flatten the land as much as possible, preferably burying the top-
soil under 10 feet or so of clay in the process. Housing projects and subdivisions resulting from this process have a bare and forlorn appearance for decades despite the fact that untold fortunes are spent on grass seed and fertilizer.

To save trees and fit a design into the natural landscape requires careful attention and much survey and design work on the part of landscape architects who know their business. While their fees may be high, investigation of a few examples convinces us that this cost is not nearly as much as that of the bulldozer operator and the bulldozer approach to this problem. The result, of course, when you design with the land is a development far more pleasant to live in and much more valuable.

Nor is the principle limited to residential subdivisions. Saving of native plant material and fitting of designs to topography are essential to commercial and industrial areas also and virtually indispensable to public and institutional facilities.

A final example on the negative side of urban conservation is the use of land for intensive urban purposes in flood plains of rivers. Expensive flood control works could have been avoided in some cases by proper zoning of the flood plain.

MEASURES REQUIRED TO IMPROVE URBAN CONSERVATION

In general there are three measures needed for improved urban development, or urban conservation.

1. Planning and Zoning

While the growth of city planning and zoning has been rapid, it is constantly falling behind in its attempt to keep up with the tremendously dynamic urban growth problems. Our planning and zoning is least effective in dealing with the most vital problem—growth and development of the urban fringe areas. We know that well drafted and enforced planning and zoning measures can be effective in guiding new urban growth before it occurs but quite frustrating instruments to correct mistakes after they have been made. It is the rural areas, the counties and the townships, where our planning and zoning efforts should be concentrated. Every county in the United States should have been zoned at least 15 years ago; yet it is estimated that not more than 200 out of the 3100 counties in the nation (6 per cent) are zoned today. In some that are zoned the quality of the regulations leaves much to be desired. Furthermore, 1900 of our counties could not enact zoning regulations even if they wanted to; state enabling legislation is lacking.
The counties and townships that do not have good zoning regulations in effect 10 years from now will probably be too late to do much more than reap the sad harvest of the urban hodge-podge within their borders.

We need more and better regional planning also. City limits are meaningless today and will be absurd tomorrow as a planning boundary. Every state should have legislation providing for effective regional planning similar to that recently enacted by Oklahoma and Indiana.

The local city, county or township cannot be expected to do a good job of planning or zoning without being able to relate its plans to the larger region of which it is but a part. Nor can these larger regions do a good job without relating their work to state and national consideration. We desperately need thorough and effective planning at the state and national levels for such matters as land use, water resources, economic trends and the like. The territorial planning now being undertaken by Hawaii is perhaps the first example of the type of broad scale planning that is needed.

2. *Pitting Development Plans to the Land*

Both encouragement and local legislation are required to bring about land development more suited to the topography. A recent ordinance of the Village of Blue Ash, Ohio, for example, prohibits subdividers from destroying any tree with a caliper of four inches or more unless it is within a roadway, driveway or actual building site. Interest of garden clubs in such matters is heartening but far more needs to be done. We should all fuss, complain, write letters to the papers, and talk to anyone that will listen to us until cruelty to the land becomes as offensive as cruelty to animals.

3. *More Public Land*

Finally, one of our biggest troubles is that all of our local governmental agencies are "land poor." In all of our communities we need to preserve great acreages of land for green belts, for forest preserves, or for what may be a far more valuable long range use for agriculture. There is no reason why we cannot use the device of purchasing development rights to much of this property, thus insuring a proper future land use. Our vastly increased urban population will require many more parks, reservations, forest preserves, lakes, beaches, etc. Good land use in the semi-urban, semi-rural community of tomorrow will require a revision in our concept of public land ownership. In essence this will be an expansion of the type of activity being undertaken so successfully by several Illinois County Forest Preserve Districts today.
CONCLUSION

Urban development of the future should tend to more and more fit itself into, if not disappear into the natural landscape. The blots on the landscape perhaps will fade away. In new city building, new urban development, we might well find guidance as well as inspiration in the following words of Albert Schweitzer:

"The great fault of ethics hitherto has been that they believed themselves to have to deal only with the relations of man to man. In reality, however, the question is what is his attitude to the world and all life that comes within his reach? A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellow man, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help."

DISCUSSION

Vice Chairman Bush: It seems, in a sense, almost bad to say anything after what I conclude to be an excellent statement of philosophy which, in a sense, undergirds all of our conservation efforts.

Mr. Siegelson: I was on a program last week in Washington and we discussed some of the things you mentioned. As a result of that discussion, the question came up which nobody seemingly could answer. Therefore, I would be very interested in getting your personal answer to this question.

You stated that we have ten years in which to pick up all the needed recreational and park lands in our urban areas. The cities, in the present situation, do not have strong committees and do not follow plans to acquire necessary areas which we have in almost all states of the Union. Our cities are getting somewhere as the background of this whole business to prepare the public for the gigantic acquisition program. We all agreed that there was no time for education, in view of the swiftness of these developments.

Therefore, if there is no time for education, how in your opinion, can we, swiftly and dynamically, do these things while there is still time? Is it a matter of setting up a Federal Study Commission to create public desires, to enable the government to move swiftly while there is time—or what is the answer?

Mr. Lovelace: First of all, I would disagree that there is no time for education. I think that a lot of the education has been done. It needs a little better focus. There are examples of where, in some places, attention of the local community was called to what needed to be done, and they have gone ahead and done it. We had a bond issue passed recently in a Texas city by a two-to-one majority to spend almost a million dollars on a park system.

What is needed is more dynamic leadership on the part of the conservation people—the garden clubs and interests of that type—to bring about specific plans and projects and get them before the voters. In nearly three-quarters of the cases the education is sufficient so that the voters will provide the money and go ahead and get the job done. The thing that we seem to lack is leadership to pull this together, to sell it, and get started. I would say that the crux of the problem is leadership.

You need attention at both levels, both from the standpoint of the over-all national problem and from the standpoint of developing effective local leadership because, to me, these are problems that have to be solved locally. The only thing that you can do nationally is to call attention to the national problem.

Mr. Olm [Michigan]: I wonder if a tool or device known as the Plat Act has
been utilized to the fullest extent in controlling sub-division of land and to what extent the states have utilized that tool in this field?

Ms. Lovelace: The difficulty in all of our urban developments is frequently that we are prone to say that we cannot do anything about this because the state legislature will not give us the power. That, in my opinion, is just an excuse—not a reason. The state legislatures have given the majority of our states more than adequate legislation to control subdividing of the land under the Plat Act, which we have in almost all states of the Union. Our cities are getting somewhere between 10 and 25 per cent of the potential value they could out of a properly enforced and adequately administered land subdivision control. Our efforts along that line could certainly be strengthened. It is not anything that we need money for. It is something that we could start doing a better job on tomorrow.

Mrs. Webster [Missouri]: I think the fact that you are recognizing the garden clubs and the women's organizations means a great deal. If you let them know that you have faith in them then they will go to bat for you in all of these things.

Vice-Chairman Bush: Thank you very much, Mr. Lovelace, and also thank you, people, for your cooperation and your questions and your comments this morning. I think the chairman has a word.

Chairman Morris: I would like to call attention to the excellent relationship that exists following through the theme of this conference. Here, of course, I have reference to the other two general conferences still to come. All of the themes of these three conferences are closely woven together.

In relation to this program today, I should like to express appreciation to the busy and distinguished people who have taken time to prepare for us these thoughtful and careful presentations that have been made here.

So far as organization of the program is concerned, as Chairman of this program, if I were to react again to the question that has to always be asked in the initial formulation of a program—what should be done that was not done—what should be added that is not here—I am very clear in my own mind of something that should have been a part of this program today which was not and, of course, I mention it for two reasons—first, to express an awareness of it and clear my own conscience as it were and, secondly, to leave it as a suggestion for future programming.

It seems to me that we have overlooked in this program today that most of the wealth of the nation is controlled by the women and, indirectly, almost all of it. Therefore, if we really want something done in the way of preventing things like stream pollution, then we ought to get the women and the women's groups in on the activity. We need not only the garden clubs but also the other women's groups and professional organizations. If we could do this we would move forward materially both in the long-term and short-term sense, because here is the source of real education and here, as well, is the motivating force.