

In our concern for preserving and cleansing our environment, we must not neglect the serious damage resulting from uncontrolled surface mining. NACD believes that there is need for a comprehensive and effective cooperative program in this field, and applauds the sponsors of the legislation on this subject pending before this committee.

Our Association believes that the best approach would be an amalgamation of the best features of the three principal proposals that you are considering: S. 217, S. 3126, and S. 3132. Specifically, we believe that the following considerations are fundamental in establishing a national program of surface mine reclamation and restoration:

1. The program should apply to all lands affected by commercial surface mining of any kind. The problems resulting from coal stripping, gravel quarrying, phosphate mining, or any other form of mineral extraction are similar. We do not believe that any particular branch of the industry should be singled out for attention.

2. It is essential that the program deal not only with the prevention of future damages through the establishment of standards for reclamation and enforcement of those standards, but also the amelioration of damages that are presently occurring due to mining in the past. This will require a program of technical and financial assistance. According to the recent study by the task force representing the Interior and Agriculture Departments and other Departments and agencies, some two million acres of mined land in the United States are urgently in need of treatment. We must, unquestionably, prevent additional land from contributing to problems that will result from unsupervised mining. But we must also rid the landscape of the existing open sores that are now eroding, polluting our lakes and rivers, and creating flood hazards.

3. The problem must be attacked on both public and private lands. Of the lands affected by surface mining to date, about 90 percent are in private ownership. No program can be effective if both types of land are not treated.

4. To be effective, the program must be a joint endeavor of both the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. Each has experience and expertise that need to be brought to bear on the problem. The Interior Department has long been engaged in the development of efficient mining techniques and the enforcement of standards to promote safety in underground mining.

The Agriculture Department, on the other hand, is the recognized authority in dealing with erosion, land reclamation, and land conservation. Working in cooperation with our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, it has built up a network of technical, financial, and educational arrangements which are being utilized in surface mine reclamation and would be available for an accelerated program. Virtually all of the research on reclaiming surface-mined lands is being done by USDA and cooperating Agricultural Experiment Stations. The Department has 20 plant materials centers where selection, evaluation, and development is in progress on suitable plants and cultural techniques for stabilizing critical sediment source areas, including lands affected by surface mining.

The Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture has nearly 35 years of experience in the scientific planning of land reclamation and conservation work, including the use of basic soils data, and the utilization of engineering and vegetative measures for restoration, erosion prevention, and site development. SCS has available a corps of nearly 8,000 trained technicians across the country familiar with the application of technology to land problems of this kind. A new USDA booklet, entitled "Restoring Surface-Mined Land," outlines the dimensions of the task and what can be done to solve the problem.

Because of the experience of both agencies, and the contributions they can make, it is essential, in our opinion, that any national surface mine reclamation program utilize both agencies.

5. That reclamation and rehabilitation of mined lands be based upon plans developed on a watershed basis or other appropriate land unit basis by qualified units of local government, such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, in consultation with private individuals and organizations, and state and federal agencies. Surface-mined areas constitute major environmental disturbances and need to be treated on a drainage area basis.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are qualified and experienced in preparing and carrying out scientific plans of this kind. They are also sponsors of many regional conservation projects which involve operations and skills similar to those in mined land reclamation—including over 825 watershed