

Educational Activities on Water Resources in Kansas

By C. R. Jaccard

Our water problems were brought into focus by the billion-dollar flood on the Kansas and Missouri Rivers in July 1951. In November of that year we had a flood forum. As the title suggests, the discussions dealt with floods, their causes, remedies, and costs. In this forum some controversy developed regarding the relative merits of upstream and downstream measures—although none of the speakers advocated a single remedy.

The flood forum was followed in the spring by a leaders' training program in the eastern half of the state. The objective of this effort was to define the issue and at the same time bring out the opportunity and obligation for small watershed development.

We selected seven counties and trained a local panel in each county to conduct a one-day discussion of the subject. Each county invited in neighboring counties. The county agent in each participating county selected a county committee composed of representatives of active groups in the county (usually about 12). The committee we trained conducted the panel, as a demonstration for the visiting counties. The visitors were to go home and continue the education. Seven of these demonstrations were given to about 35 visiting county committees. Within 30 days after the last demonstration, 70 meetings of various nature were held in the 35 counties.

The passage of the Pilot Watershed Act in 1953 brought into focus the watershed treatment program. Six of the pilot projects were offered in Kansas, and five were accepted by the people. These five areas were ready because, as a result of our earlier work, surveys were practically completed in most of the areas and much of the conservation was already on the land. This indicates that an educational effort may be necessary to get any complete watershed program accepted. In view of the legal requirements of the new act and the enabling legislation in the states, the educational job is not simple.

The five pilot watersheds were started with an interagency meeting at the state level to explain the program. The group attending this meeting set up a Kansas Watershed Education Committee, composed of representatives from SCS, Extension, ACP, and FHA. Our duties were to:

1. Coordinate the education and information program to be

carried out in all watershed projects, state-wide as well as in the pilot watersheds.

2. Actively aid and assist local agencies and groups in carrying out their educational and information programs.

3. Discover and develop educational and informational aids, such as charts, graphs, maps, photographs, films, slides, etc., that will help in explaining the details of the program to local groups.

4. Help develop and assist in carrying out any needed tours, demonstrations, meetings, conferences, etc.

5. Meet with a representative of the Kansas Water Resources Board and coordinate the education and information phase of state watershed district formation so that local people will be in a better position to decide when to and when not to form a watershed district under the state law.

The committee first prepared an information kit for local leaders. Under the leadership of the local Soil Conservation District supervisors, we held leadership training meetings, principally to help the supervisors decide upon procedure. The plan for obtaining approval was for the supervisors to ask a local leader to invite to his home several neighbors to discuss the plan. The watershed was organized from top to bottom so that every person operating in the watershed would be reached.

The county agents and SCS personnel helped in organizing and conducting these meetings, but the proprietary pride of the district supervisors was so strong that their enthusiasm and unstinting use of their time was the principal factor in securing prompt acceptance in the watersheds. But there is a difference between organization in the pilot watersheds and organization under the present law. The cost-sharing features now in effect are "cause for pause." Less outside money is available, and explaining this in a way that creates acceptance is more difficult.

Since the new law was passed nine applications have been received and four have been approved. One has organized under the state law, another is in the process, and one was voted down.

Intensive educational work has not been possible, principally because no individual has been assigned the task. "What's everybody's business is nobody's business." Hence, groups within a watershed become discouraged with their efforts. This present watershed program is one the occupiers must want, and the creation of that desire requires an educational process which calls for more

devoted personnel than has yet been available. Our state watershed act provides for the organization of a district with powers similar to a drainage district. Two elections must be held before the organization is completed. People are reluctant to authorize another taxing body. Since they are not likely to know the total construction costs before voting, a favorable vote requires an intensive program to explain to each occupier the value of the project. As a consequence, our watershed educational committee has again been called into action and has planned a series of meetings covering the state to stimulate a more effective educational program.

In 1954, the subject of our annual forum was "Water Problems." Since the established institutional policy was to have an annual public policy forum, our committee appointed for 1954 asked to be allowed to plan a three-year program that would cover land, water, and people. Our request was granted. Since 1954 was a year of water shortage, and some controversies were arising in local areas over the use of water, we felt it was appropriate to begin our series with the discussion of water.

It seemed obvious that a more definite water policy must be established in Kansas and in the nation. Our objective was to stimulate thinking on what should be the water policy for Kansas and how it should be established. "The prime objective of this forum," said President McCain in opening the forum, "is to equip Kansas with the opportunity to make informed and enlightened judgments about the water problem as it affects our state and our local communities."

Since the water forum, the legislature has established a Water Resources Board. The duties of this board are to:

1. Collect and compile information pertaining to climate, water, and soil as related to usage of water for agricultural, industrial, and municipal purposes and the availability of water supplies in the several watersheds of the state.
2. Work out a state plan of water resources development for each watershed of the state and to cooperate with any agency of the state or federal government now or hereafter engaged in development of such plans or which have developed plans for the purpose.
3. Review plans for the development, management, and use of the water resources of the state by any state or local agency.
4. Make a study of the laws of this state and other states and the federal government relating to conservation and development of water for beneficial use, flood control, construction of levees, drain-

age, irrigation, soil conservation, watershed development, stream control, gauging of stream and stream pollution for the purpose of determining the necessity or advisability of new or amendatory state legislation.

5. Make recommendations to other state agencies and political subdivisions for the coordination of their activities relating to the subjects named in (4).

6. Make recommendations to the 1957 legislature and to each biennial session thereafter and to the governor and the legislative council at such times as the board deems advisable concerning necessary or advisable legislation relating to the subjects required to be studied by the board.

Although we cannot claim that the forum resulted in the legislation, it is not presumptuous to assume that it made some contribution toward positive action.

