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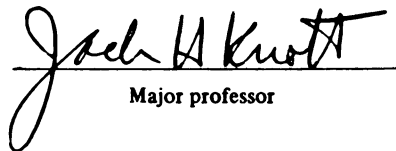
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOIL CONSERVATION
DISTRICTS AND THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

presented by

David J. Poe

has been accepted towards fulfillment
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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOIL CONSERVATION
DISTRICTS AND THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE**

BY

David J. Poe

A THESIS

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOIL CONSERVATION
DISTRICTS AND THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

By

David J. Poe

This thesis covers the interactions between the Soil Conservation Service and the Soil Conservation Districts. It examines the concept of agency capture and proposes that there are circumstances and situations where administrative agencies working with a small, single interest clientele can prevent or lessen the impact of agency capture. This thesis also examines the advantages and disadvantages of the agency-clientele relationship demonstrated by the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts and explains the agreements and circumstances upon which this relationship rests.

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THESIS STATEMENT

If administrative agencies are to survive and grow, they must acquire political skill, leadership and widespread public support. Where government agencies must compete with other agencies providing similar services, they are forced to search for political and economic advantages. If the clientele is large and widely dispersed, it will not usually be a problem to get elected legislators to support this type of agency because it dispenses benefits to a clientele that is important to both the agency and the legislator. (Rourke, 1978, p.224)

The Traditional Capture Model #1

In the quest for support, government agencies sometimes form a three-way alliance called a sub-government. In this three-way alliance, the interest group supplies political support for certain key congressmen who are in a position to help the government agency. The congressmen provide budgetary and legislative support for the agency's program. The agency supplies the services wanted by the interest group. All three get what they want by cooperating together. (Knott and Miller, 1986, p.158)

According to Bernstein, agencies who work with a small organized clientele are likely to be captured and forced to relinquish control of their programs to their clientele. According to

Selznick, channeling a program through a local institution tends to reinforce the legitimacy of these institutions and the continuance of the status quo. (Selznick, 1949 p.35) The clientele Bernstein describes works in a relatively autonomous environment. It generates its own power and promotes its own objectives, policies and programs. The clientele's interests tend to be narrow in scope and reflect the limited interests of its members which are usually in conflict with the collective good of the general public. In this relationship, a variety of sources provide information to the clientele. The clientele and the members selected to represent the clientele normally share similar views. (Bernstein, 1955 pp. 153-168) Most of the decisions made by the clientele's representatives are made as a result of communications from the clientele at large and not by the agency. The representatives communicate with their clientele because they want to be sure the needs of their clients are satisfied. The communications determine and help define their roles, position descriptions and goals. The representatives are held accountable by means of this communication and their positions are strengthened or weakened by how they perform or by how they are perceived to be performing via the communications.

The capture in the relationship is one-sided and

is imposed upon the agency. A closely related problem is that the broad perspective and coordination of programs supplied by the executive branch is usually lost. Communications and sharing of experiences that occur over a large area are not passed on because of the attendant decentralization of executive authority and the narrow interests of small organizations. Bernstein did not believe that agencies working through decentralized organizations could maintain the perspective and judgement needed to handle the technical and administrative problems of a broad national program. On the contrary, Bernstein believed that this type of organization fails to adapt to changing conditions, does not allow for wide discretion in administration, encourages favoritism and is inconsistent. (Bernstein, 1955,p.285)

Another closely related problem associated with agency capture is that administrative agencies frequently become rigid and lose their ability to provide efficient and effective services. (Crozier, 1964, p.187) The rigidity is caused by the increasingly large amount of rules and policies, (red tape) which are established to control the actions of the agency's employees. Once the rules and policies are established, there is a strong attempt to handle all situations according to established rules and policies. If the agency is captured by its clientele, it is probable that the agency will be more

inflexible than before because the agency's employees once captured must follow the rules and policies established by both the agency and the interest group. The captured agency is likely to become rigid and locked into a mode of operations that stifles creativity and smothers its crusading spirit.

This kind of agency-interest group relationship will be called Model #1. An example is the third-class mail users and Postal workers. They both work together to hold down third-class rates and to impose the bulk of the the costs upon the first-class mail users. They hold down postal rates for third class users by lobbying collectively and by lobbying with much more vigor than the majority of the mail users who have only a little to gain or lose and, therefore, usually demonstrate little enthusiasm for opposing the increase in costs. The result is that the general public is forced to subsidize the third-class mail users. The Postal workers in this case work against the collective good of the general public and serve the narrow interests of a small group in order to gain their support.

(Knott and Miller, 1986, p.156)

The Interest Group Capture Model #2

An administrative agency may be able to prevent or at least lessen the influence of agency capture if the agency can turn the tables and capture the interest

group. This type of capture is possible where some or all of the following occur:

1. The agency is composed of a group of experts who possess a large body of knowledge that cannot be easily mastered by the interest group or its representatives. The goals, objectives and programs of the agency cannot be readily challenged unless this body of knowledge is understood. (Pressman, 1975 p.32)

2. The agency is a primary supplier of information to the interest group and other informational sources are limited. (Pressman, 1975, p.32)

3. The agency should be able to control a large part of the communications between the representatives of the interest group and the rank and file members. By granting or withholding publicity and information, the agency could influence the interest group agenda and the power individual members can develop. (Pressman, 1975, p.50)

4. The agency has an educational capacity to expand the knowledge and beliefs of their clientele and their clientele's representatives.

5. The general goals and objectives of the interest group and the administrative agency are closely aligned or at least are not in direct conflict with each other.

6. The clientele and members representing their interests should have a relatively passive nature and

seldom consist of lawyers and other professionals who are skilled in political and administrative tactics. It also helps where the benefits are not sufficient to encourage the interest group representatives to spend the time and resources to act in a totally independent capacity. (Berry, p.117, 1984)

7. The public interest group should be allowed freedom of action and not be structured to where the officers or their representatives are obligated to actively solicit the concerns of the members and subsequently report to the members on how their concerns were addressed. If the officers or representatives are forced to solicit and report on the concerns of its members, it becomes obvious if the representatives do not promote their client's programs, policies and objectives. The identification of the client's views and subsequent report on their activities is a strong incentive for the representatives to resist the influences from others such as the agency. Issues on which the interest group decides to act should be able to come easily from the agency with whom it cooperates. (Berry, p. 188, 1977)

An example of interest group capture is the city manager and his staff in Oakland, California and their relationship to the city council. The city manager and his staff are all experts and most of the informational resources are available only to them.

The city council has a secretary who is poorly informed with limited skills. The city manager and his staff enjoy the support of the city council but are free to work in an almost autonomous environment free from the direct influence of the council members.

(Pressman, 1975, p.32) The city council members are elected to represent the views of the public but because of the strong influence of the city manager and his staff, the city council is not able to effectively represent the views of the general public. Both the city manager and the council support each other when opposition against their programs develops.

Type #2 as demonstrated by Soil Conservation

Districts:

In this thesis, I will examine the usefulness of the concept of agency capture in the context of one agency, the Soil Conservation Service. I have chosen this agency because its political situation challenges some of the factors just outlined in model #1 between administrative agencies and their clientele.

The Soil Conservation Service is a federal, administrative agency composed primarily of highly trained experts in natural resource management. Rural landowners consisting mostly of farmers make up most of the Soil Conservation Services's clientele. Representatives of this clientele are organized into Soil Conservation Districts. The Soil Conservation Districts are by statute designated as units of state

government.

The Soil Conservation Districts are organized into governing bodies that function similar to government commissions. The name and secondary functions of the Soil Conservation Districts serve to camouflage their relationship with the Soil Conservation Service.

The Soil Conservation Districts develop close ties with certain key congressmen who serve on agriculture and budgetary committees. The Soil Conservation District directors support these congressmen and use their influence to lobby for the Soil Conservation Service and its programs. The Soil Conservation Service supplies many of the services wanted by the Soil Conservation District directors and the local interests they represent.

Soil Conservation Districts are not usually autonomous but operate in a dynamic environment in which many influences determine their objectives, policies and programs. Rather than independently develop their own power, Soil Conservation Districts work cooperatively with the Soil Conservation Service and others to generate political power. The objectives, policies and programs of the Soil Conservation Service are similar but in certain ways are significantly different than the objectives, policies and programs of their clientele and more closely reflect the broad national interests and the

collective good of the general public. Rather than develop numerous channels for obtaining information, the information provided to the Soil Conservation Districts comes primarily from the Soil Conservation Service and its allies. The allies are such agencies as the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, The Farmers Home Administration and the U.S. Forest Service. Most of the top level agency members build alliances with those agencies who agree to promote each other's policies and programs. Capture in this relationship is two-sided but is imposed primarily upon the Soil Conservation Districts.

The Soil Conservation Service exercises strong influence over the organized segment of its clientele--the Soil Conservation Districts. The Soil Conservation Service uses a highly organized system to encourage Soil Conservation Districts to echo the policies it considers important. The results of these efforts serve to prevent agency capture.

Decentralization for the Soil Conservation Service has not necessarily produced a narrow point of view for the local Soil Conservation Service personnel that excludes consideration of broad national objectives. The Soil Conservation Service is decentralized to the extent that individual State Conservationists can select from a variety of national

programs and adapt and prioritize them according to their individual preferences. There is expected, however, to be a fairly good balance of programs adopted and certain sanctions which will not be explained in this paper can be imposed to encourage this balance. The expected behavior normally caused by decentralization and agency capture was altered. If the Soil Conservation Service were captured, a more complete type of decentralization would be necessary to allow the Soil Conservation Service to adopt the programs, policies and objectives desired by the variety of local Soil Conservation Districts.

The large group of experts, superior informational, communications and educational resources, and a complex parallel structure prevent the individual Districts from imposing their interests upon the Soil Conservation Service.

The Administrators of the Soil Conservation Service and their staffs are aware of the potential problems of rigidity and have encouraged the Soil Conservation Districts to influence the policies, programs and objectives of the Soil Conservation Service within the parameters they have established. In many cases a form of accommodation takes place that satisfies the important interests of both the agency and its clientele.

The implications of this thesis are that it

encourages those studying organizational behavior to appreciate the dynamics of organizations and the complexities that make behavior very difficult to predict. Agency capture will not always occur and depends upon whether factors such as those listed in model #1 are present. It also should demonstrate the reasons why this symbiotic relationship between the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts has been able to hold together.

In this thesis, I will address the following subjects in order to explain why the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts do not fully comply with the traditional capture model, model #1, of how agencies and their clientele behave:

(1) Organization of the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts.

(2) What Soil Conservation Districts do for the Soil Conservation Service.

(3) What the Soil Conservation Service does for and to the Soil Conservation Districts.

(4) Has the Soil Conservation Service been able to avoid capture?

(5) Current movements by Soil Conservation Districts toward Model #1.

METHODOLOGY:

The methods that were used to gather material for this thesis come from my observations based upon approximately twenty years of working for the

Soil Conservation Service and with Soil Conservation Districts.

The subject matter is relevant because the Soil Conservation Service did not act according to some of the standard predictions of organizational behavior. The hazards of agency capture occurring and altering the policies, actions and goals of the Soil Conservation Service were partially avoided. The decentralization of control limiting or interfering with the performance of the Soil Conservation Service was also partially avoided. The subject matter is also important because The U.S. Department of Agriculture encouraged the creation of an entity that is an interesting blend of both interest group and government agency that has very real advantages in providing for agency survival and in preventing or decreasing the problems of rigidity that normally afflict organizations as they mature.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE:

In the 1930's, the depression plagued the United States. Part of Roosevelt's "New Deal" plan to pull the United States out of the depression was to help the farmers who were suffering from severe erosion problems and in desperate need of relief. Roosevelt wanted to create jobs for the unemployed and to solve these erosion problems which ravaged the farmers and the land. He believed one method of supplying jobs

was to help the farmers who employed a considerable number of people but were too impoverished to make a rapid recovery without government assistance.

The Executive branch and the U.S. Congress wanted to form a new agricultural agency because they did not believe the existing agencies, primarily the Cooperative Extension Service, would carry out their desires and place the emphasis where they wanted.

The Cooperative Extension Service administers its programs through land grant colleges and does not have a strong chain of command from Washington to the states. The Secretary of Agriculture was afraid the Extension Service would be more responsive to the universities and the American Farm Bureau than to the Secretary of Agriculture. The Secretary wanted a new program with a different emphasis. The Secretary wanted the new agency to take on some unpopular tasks such as enforcing land use regulations. (Morgan, 1965 p.50) The Extension's typical mode of operation was to provide priority to servicing the largest and most prosperous landowners. The Secretary, at the urging of the President and Congress, wanted a program that would apply to all landowners and be particularly directed toward those landowners who had serious erosion problems.

In 1933 in an effort to create a new organization and protect it from a hostile environment in the United States Department of Agriculture, the President established the Soil

Erosion Service (Predecessor to the Soil Conservation Service) in the U.S. Department of the Interior. Chief among the opponents of the Soil Conservation Service was the Cooperative Extension Service which already had a cadre of personnel in place.

The President wanted the new agency to gain some experience and political strength before it was tossed into the United States Department of Agriculture with its potential enemies. In 1935 the Soil Conservation Service was considered strong enough to survive and was transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In 1937 the President sent a letter to the Governors of all the states, urging the passage of state legislation to establish a Soil Conservation District program that would open the door for the Soil Conservation Service to become established. By law the Soil Conservation Service can only set up a permanent office where a Soil Conservation District is established. The letter sent by the President contained Standard State Soil Conservation District Law consisting of 64 pages of detailed duties, policies and procedures recommended for adoption by state legislatures to organize Soil Conservation Districts and a state committee to advise them.

By July 1, 1945, all 48 states had passed enabling legislation that provided for the establishment of Soil Conservation Districts.

In 1946 the National Association of Conservation Districts was organized and has since functioned as the primary lobbyist for the Soil Conservation Service.

The Secretary of Agriculture expected the Soil Conservation Service to become the Department's multiple-purpose conservation agency with the mission of planning and developing a national program of erosion and flood control on agricultural land. (Morgan, 1965, p.364) Beginning in the 1940's, the Soil Conservation Service grew each year until the late 1960s and established offices in almost all of the counties in the United States.

In 1953 the Secretary of Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture, stated his plans to have the Cooperative Extension Service take over the duties of the Soil Conservation Service. In the same year a massive publicity campaign by the Soil Conservation Districts rescued the Soil Conservation Service. (Morgan, 1965, p.159)

By the mid 1970s, the Soil Conservation Service had peaked and from that time has been funded at a level equal or less than the preceding year in terms of the actual purchasing power of the appropriation. The actual appropriations each year have been slightly higher but have not adequately accounted for the effects of inflation. In the 1970's, some of the more significant influences on

conservation policy began to come from a public not directly associated with farming. At this time the President and members of congress began to recognize that the Soil Conservation Service was not going to provide all of the services and assume all of the responsibilities that are necessary to protect our natural resources and the environment. It was also at this time that much of the emphasis and support shifted to a new organization, the Environmental Protection Agency which was willing to accept the job of enforcement and regulation.

The honeymoon was over for the Soil Conservation Service. In 1985 the President proposed to begin phasing the Soil Conservation Service out of existence beginning in 1986. The executive branch did not single out the Soil Conservation Service as an agency that no longer was useful. There are over forty separate agencies in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Most of the agencies who do not enjoy broad national support were recommended for severe reductions in appropriations.

Organization of the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts:

The Soil Conservation Service is a rather flat organization. The chain of command is from the Chief in the national office to the State Conservationist in each state, to the Area Conservationist who supervises operations over a section of one state and finally to field level personnel called District Conservationists

who usually cover an area equal to one county. There are four regional offices with a staff of specialists who, for the most part, act as technical advisors to the State Conservationist in each state.

The Soil Conservation Service administers a number of programs that are carried out simultaneously. Most of these programs are used to assist the public on privately owned land.

The Soil Conservation Service provides assistance to the public through a unique statute that provides for a local entity of elected or appointed officials to set priorities for much of the work carried out by the District Conservationists. The local entities are called Soil Conservation Districts and their boundaries generally follow county lines and include almost all of the privately owned land in the United States.

The Soil Conservation Service has the mission of protecting soil, water and other natural resources in a manner that promotes the collective good of the entire United States.

The issue of conserving our natural resources enjoys a favorable attitude with most of the public; however, soil conserving practices are received and implemented with limited enthusiasm by many rural landowners. Soil conservation has never been part of a mass movement on the part of farmers. (Gordon, 1961 p.373) In general the Soil

Conservation Service's clientele are not highly motivated because of their desires for conserving the soil and our natural resources. Many farmers with erosion problems are willing to sacrifice soil for increased efficiency or production. Most farmers know that soil erosion usually does not significantly affect their short term goals. For a short period, the effects of erosion can often be concealed by increased applications of fertilizer. The losses from soil erosion are not readily apparent because each time the soil is plowed, the traces of erosion are filled in and smoothed over. Where the soil is deep, the losses in soil productivity may not occur for fifteen years or more. Making payments on debt or purchasing new equipment frequently overrides long term considerations for the soil.

Frequently, the benefits that are held in highest regard by land owners are those that are given lower priority by the Soil Conservation Service. Services that provide direct money savings or recreational enjoyment are usually the most appreciated.

Even though the Soil Conservation Service mission of conserving natural resources is supported by a public that far exceeds its clientele, still the shrinking farm population and the never ending food surpluses do not

produce a very strong sense of urgency in the mind of the public for conservation programs.

The Soil Conservation Service's clientele is not very large but they are dispersed in all of the states. The Soil Conservation District directors are also part of the Soil Conservation Service clientele but are considerably above average in their willingness to act as entrepreneurs of new technologies and ideas. One large disadvantage for the Soil Conservation Service in its efforts to survive is that the Soil Conservation Service only serves one significant clientele group, the farm community.

Fortunately the farm community is considered an elite constituency. Most people have a high regard for those few land owners who produce most of our food at relatively low prices.

By law the Soil Conservation Districts are units of state government. Soil Conservation Districts were created just prior to opening up each Soil Conservation Service field office. No parent organization was ever set up to regulate the actions of Soil Conservation Districts.

A Soil Conservation District is composed of locally elected and/or appointed directors who serve without pay and are fairly representative of the Soil Conservation Service clientele. In some states the directors are called supervisors and in other states

they are called commissioners.

The number of directors in each District varies from state to state but is usually no less than five or more than twelve. In some states, the Directors are elected by the general public. In other states such as Michigan, only landowners are eligible to vote. In most cases some of the directors are elected and some are appointed. When the directors are appointed, nominations are usually made by the local Soil Conservation District directors and officially confirmed by the state committee set up to assist the Districts. The time each director spends working for the Soil Conservation District varies but on the average is only a few hours per week.

The District directors are not usually paid. The Directors are only compensated for actual expenses that occur for travel, mail, telephone calls or other similar expenses.

The Soil Conservation Districts have developed an organizational hierarchy that resembles the hierarchy of the Soil Conservation Service as outlined below:

National SCS	National SCD Association
Regional SCS	Multiple State SCD Assoc.
State SCS	State SCD Association
Area SCS	Multiple County SCD Assoc.
SCS field office	Soil Conservation District

located in same office

The positions of the Soil Conservation District (SCD) Association officers are tied to the local Soil Conservation Districts. Soil Conservation District Associations at the various levels are not legal units of government; however, officers in the Associations must be directors of local districts. The regional and national Conservation District Associations have several well paid, full time staff persons working to promote Soil Conservation Service views and objectives. The principal staff in the National Soil Conservation District Association work very closely with high ranking Soil Conservation Service employees. On occasion, Soil Conservation Service employees have accepted temporary assignments to work full time with the National Conservation District Association's personnel. The Associations are supported by dues from local Soil Conservation Districts and grants or donations from other sources. Soil Conservation Service employees are strongly encouraged to financially support the State and National Soil Conservation District Associations as affiliate members.

Members of Soil Conservation Districts are not held accountable in a bureaucratic hierarchy for what they do or do not do. For almost all of their actions, they function as autonomous organizations. The prevailing view of state committee members seems to be that Soil

Conservation Districts are independent units of local government which should function with aid, but not dictation from their state committees. State committees are set up in most states to give broad guidance to Districts and generally expect Districts to perform certain bookkeeping, auditing and budgeting functions as a basis for receiving limited state funds. State committees also require certain procedures to be followed in the election of Soil Conservation District directors. The state committees do not require districts to adhere to specific procedures but encourage districts to submit copies of their annual audits, reports of annual activities and annual work plans. (Morgan, 1965, p.253)

In Michigan a few rules are suggested on how Soil Conservation Districts should operate; however, most rules are not binding and those not liked are usually ignored. The state committees frequently have a limited staff of paid, full time state employees to assist with the training and development of Soil Conservation District directors.

Districts rarely have natural resource goals and objectives which are separate and distinct from the Soil Conservation Service. Officially, the Soil Conservation Service insists that it merely helps districts execute their own programs and annual plans. (Morgan, 1965, p.282)

Soil Conservation Districts can function and often

do with limited public funding. Most Districts rely primarily on local grants and fund raising activities to support their activities. Most Districts receive some state funds and are encouraged to request funds from counties and other local units of government. Two of the most common purposes for which district funds are used are the employment of clerks to relieve Soil Conservation Service technicians from some administrative duties and the employment of conservation aides who assist Soil Conservation Service technicians in laying out practices on farms. (Morgan, 1965, p.247)

Under the present system, the District directors can function with unbridled enthusiasm and pursue any concern or subject they or their friends desire. The federal rules and regulations which limit the actions of the Soil Conservation Service employees cannot be imposed upon Districts. District directors are farmers, for the most part, and cannot be penalized or sanctioned for their actions because of this unique status. They have very little to lose in the way of money and they do not have a higher authority or even a congressional body to which they are dependent.

Even though the Soil Conservation Districts spend a large part of their time working to influence elected legislators, they prefer not to think of themselves as lobbyists. The Soil Conservation District directors prefer to think of

themselves as members of state government who work in tandem with the Soil Conservation Service to protect our nation's natural resources.

The advantages of being designated a government agency are that it gives the Districts a legitimate status in the eyes of the public with and an indisputable identity separate and distinct from the Soil Conservation Service.

If Soil Conservation District directors were considered as just an interest group by the general public, the following problems would occur:

(1) Funding would be very difficult to obtain. The public might be reluctant to have their funds used to support an interest group regardless of the value of its objectives.

(2) The elite status of directors who are looked upon as the protectors of our natural resources would be more difficult to promote. The image of both the Soil Conservation Service and Districts would be lowered. In order for Districts to be effective, they need a high degree of credibility. It is important for the Soil Conservation Service that the status of the Soil Conservation Districts be elevated above that of a typical interest group.

(3) The right to act as representatives for the rural communities might be challenged if the Districts were viewed as interest groups.

(4) Districts' legal authority to sponsor

Watershed protection and Flood Prevention Projects, River Basin Study projects, Resource Conservation and Development projects etc. would be limited by federal and state laws. These types of projects must be sponsored by authorized units of government.

What Soil Conservation Districts do for the Soil Conservation Service.

The designation of Soil Conservation Districts as units of State Government created a paradox of problems and blessings for the Soil Conservation Service.

Soil Conservation District directors are sometimes aggressive to the point where they make demands for which it is difficult to comply or they become involved in matters that are considered the exclusive business of the Soil Conservation Service such as the management of its personnel.

Although District directors do not enjoy the label of interest group, they are very proficient in this type of activity. Soil Conservation Districts because of their abilities to act as interest groups have played a large part in mobilizing support for the Soil Conservation Service.

The Soil Conservation Districts are taught how to become politically active. The directors are trained by experienced Soil Conservation District directors, Soil Conservation District Association staff, the Soil Conservation Service personnel, State Committee staff

and others. The District directors are taught how to develop political ties and exercise political influence with congressional members on the state and federal house and senate agricultural committees.

Directors are trained in the political action processes at the very beginning of their tenure. For example certain directors may be assigned by the President of the Soil Conservation District Association as the contact persons for certain national congressmen, state legislators, national Secretary of Agriculture, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, various state agricultural agencies and organizations, the governor's office etc.

Directors are trained formally and informally to identify issues such as the need for new legislation, need to amend existing legislation, need to affect an appropriation's level etc. Directors are also taught to prepare brief and relevant positions on national and state issues.

Directors are also taught how to implement their plans. The key legislators who serve on important committees such as Agricultural, Budget and Appropriations committees are identified by the District Association staff for the directors. The way to approach each legislator is carefully planned out in a way that it is most likely to succeed. District association officers are trained to

coordinate the efforts of individual directors by providing coaching and follow-up where needed.

Congressmen are frequently invited to speak at District functions especially where large bodies of the public are invited. Soil Conservation District Association staff monitor the legislative activity nationwide and report their findings to Soil Conservation District directors.

Many of these political activities are carried out to provide legislative and budgetary support for the Soil Conservation Service and its various programs and policies.

Soil Conservation Districts also have a significant impact upon Soil Conservation Service operations. A service agency such as the Soil Conservation Service must be able to adapt quickly to changes if it is to retain a position of power generated from the clientele it serves. The value of the Soil Conservation Service's services are largely dependent upon its flexibility and willingness to change outmoded solutions that can generate criticism rather than support. Soil Conservation Districts help the Soil Conservation Service to overcome pressures to become more rigid.

According to Crozier, there are certain characteristics which limit an organization's ability to adapt to the environment and provide quality service that is held in high regard by its clients. (Crozier, 1964, p.187) One characteristic that limits an

organization's effectiveness is the organization's impersonal rules which are developed to reduce uncertainty and improve efficiency. The Soil Conservation Service like other organizations has bookcases full of books which were prepared to regulate and direct the actions of their employees. These regulations or policies are cross-coordinated in a multitude of different documents to cover a wide range of employee responsibilities and actions. Changing one rule often requires changes to take place in several other rules. Changes can be made but only after extensive reviews, reams of paper and dozens of bureaucratic adjustments. Because of the difficulty in changing these impersonal rules and their perceived need to keep uncertainty in check, government agencies tend to resist change as long as they can. Few rewards are given to those employees who suggest anything other than superficial changes. Real idea men and women run the risk of being labeled rebellious, particularly if they challenge the status quo on a regular basis.

Another characteristic which tends to limit the value of an agency's services and, thus, its power is the centralization of the decision making process. (Crozier, 1964 p.189) Information coming from the field signaling the need for a change tends to be filtered or vetoed as it moves up and down the agency's hierarchy. Each level of the hierarchy has

its own biases, special interests, or limited perspective which is imposed upon the new idea as it goes through the gauntlet of reviews and editing.

Another characteristic which limits an organization's flexibility and, thus, its power is the historical and cultural patterns which develop as agencies mature. (Crozier, 1964, p.204) There are many traditions which still linger in the Soil Conservation Service. One example is the belief that farmers and the general public place a high priority on solving erosion problems. Actually, as with other segments of the general public, farmers are more concerned about making money and developing recreational opportunities. It is only when conservation produces these other benefits that it becomes very popular with a large segment of the public. The emphasis on different programs changes as national leaders in the Soil Conservation Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture come and go. The original leaders in the Soil Conservation Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture established a broad based program probably because of their desire to provide more support for the Soil Conservation Service.

Another characteristic is the number and strength of professional groups who are able to secure an autonomous position within an organization. (Crozier, 1964, p.156) These professional groups

consider their policies and professional decisions above question outside their own group. In the Soil Conservation Service, these professional groups are the engineers, soil scientists, foresters, biologists, range conservationists and others. It has been my experience that line officers and staff are reluctant to override or challenge the decisions of these professionals. Because of these and other reasons, agencies tend to provide poor service and lose power as they mature. (Crozier, 1964, p.195)

Districts help the Soil Conservation Service overcome the problems that normally occur as agencies mature in the following ways:

(a) Districts provide an informal structure for Soil Conservation Service employees to use in communicating messages to top officials. This provides a means for the employees to circumvent some of the veto points through which messages must pass as they move up the Soil Conservation Service hierarchy.

The Districts do not always get their way when they suggest change but they can be assured of getting a detailed, personal explanation of why the Soil Conservation Service believes a certain policy should be followed and not changed.

(b) Districts help the Soil Conservation Service by acting as a barometer to measure the quality of its service and the likes and dislikes of its clientele. Soil Conservation Service employees are trained and

evaluated on how well they get along with District directors. This process of explaining or defending policies and procedures to farmers who are actual practitioners acts as a refiner's fire for Soil Conservation Service personnel rounding off the rough edges and broadening their perspectives.

The Soil Conservation Service assists private landowners with problems dealing with natural resources. In recent years the natural resources environment has been bombarded by change. New chemicals flow forth to combat a variety of weeds, diseases and insects. New machinery using laser and computer technology, plant genetics, and changing world needs for natural resources are opening up a vast frontier of possibilities. The directors provide rapid feedback to the Soil Conservation Service on the effectiveness of its programs and the value of its technologies.

The Districts also have another advantage in bringing about change. Districts do not always grant immunity to professional groups. Engineers, agronomists, foresters, soil scientists, biologists and other highly trained Soil Conservation Service personnel are required by their supervisors to learn how to work closely with a group of rural citizens who become Soil Conservation District directors. Soil Conservation Service personnel are required to

listen to these directors, make friends or at least not offend them, explain Service programs and policies to them and in one way or another gain their support.

If a Soil Conservation District disagrees with a certain professional policy, the directors may challenge the policy. (Morgan, 1965, p.282) The directors may challenge the policy openly or invite a professional from another agency or organization to challenge the policy. The Soil Conservation Districts have been able to break down many fiefdoms by forcing agency personnel to explain their actions. For example if a government forester only approved the government subsidy for planting red pine and no other species, the Soil Conservation District could challenge his actions and point out the merits of using other tree species. Normally the Soil Conservation Service professionals provide the confidence and back-up needed by District directors to attempt this type of challenge.

Districts influence the operations of the Soil Conservation Service in the following ways:

(1) Districts lobby for the Soil Conservation Service funding, authorities, etc. The image of one is for all practical purposes a mirror image of the other. One method of elevating the status of Districts was by getting them designated as units of

state government. Another method used by the Soil Conservation Service to elevate the status of the Soil Conservation Districts is for the Soil Conservation Service to do most of the work and provide a variety of functions and then credit these accomplishments partially to the Soil Conservation Districts. Districts are usually credited as sponsors of small watershed projects, River Basin studies, Resource Conservation and Development projects, etc., even when their role is very limited. Some District directors work hard as sponsors but more frequently they are asked to sign documents, provide their blessings on work that is prepared for them or to act as a spokesperson for controversial issues as will be explained later on. The Soil Conservation Service clientele are frequently asked by Soil Conservation Service employees to sign agreements to cooperate with Districts.

(2) Districts protect and buffer the Soil Conservation Service from its enemies. This is very important since the Soil Conservation Service must function in the midst of other agricultural agencies who work on many of the same natural resource problems. There has also evolved a multitude of interest groups who have very strong views on how various natural resources should be used. When things get tough, the Soil Conservation Service always has the option of encouraging the District directors to

decide the issue knowing that in most cases the directors will support the Soil Conservation Service point of view and absorb whatever criticism is offered.

(3) Districts help the Soil Conservation Service with program development. The Soil Conservation Service is expected to be neutral in many controversial programs where some of the population gain and some lose such as in the small watershed projects. There are still many people who believe that administrators of government agencies should be passive and subordinate to public opinion. (Gordon, 1961, p.45) Unless someone takes a strong active position in favor of a project that is of sufficient magnitude and significance to affect more than one or two people, no project will ever get completed. In watershed protection and flood prevention projects, some landowners may own land in the upper reaches of the watershed and are required to sacrifice their land for impounding water in order to protect other land farther downstream from flooding. Districts can be used to voice the views of the Soil Conservation Service and expound the virtues of the project when needed to overcome opposition and get the project funded and completed.

Some of the opposition to Soil Conservation Service programs and projects comes from fish and wildlife organizations, recreational or hunting

groups who want to protect the existing land use. Other forms of opposition may come from groups and individuals who prefer projects more favorable to their interests.

Soil Conservation Districts are also encouraged to form alliances with other units of local, state and federal government agencies who work with natural resources in their area. These alliances are formalized through memorandums of understanding and are typically made with the state agricultural, forestry and wildlife agencies, Cooperative Extension Service, planning and zoning commissions, health departments, drain commissioners, highway and road commissions and others. These memorandums help establish and clarify the roles different agencies perform and can be used when needed to force cooperation and fair play. For example the Soil Conservation Service may find the best solution for controlling urban erosion is to urge the planning and zoning commissions to adopt more restrictive land use regulations. In this way the Districts could further the erosion control program.

What the Soil Conservation Service does for and to Soil Conservation Districts.

Soil Conservation Service employees are frequently reminded that they are not to be involved in or concern themselves with the election or

selection of the governing bodies of Soil Conservation Districts; However, in spite of these directives, Soil Conservation Service personnel are expected to have some influence on the selection of prospective candidates to be put on the ballot for election of District directors. Evidence that Soil Conservation Service personnel were involved was found during field interviews in six out of thirteen districts located in nine different states sampled. (Morgan, 1965, p.224)

Those employees who view Soil Conservation Districts as units of State Government expect the directors to develop their own identities and to observe certain standards of behavior that are typical of government employees. One of the disadvantages of Districts acting as units of governments is that individual directors are not paid and sometimes they do not take their positions very seriously. One district conservationist wrote to Ezra Taft Benson, former Secretary of Agriculture, "outside of channels calling Soil Conservation Districts a Soil Conservation Service propaganda device and a front. He said very few Districts do much of themselves without the Soil Conservation Service people there suggesting, needling, and even doing most of the work for them. Most of the reports of the Soil Conservation Districts are written by Soil Conservation Service men. I have never seen a Soil Conservation District that is independent or

self governing." (Morgan, 1965, p.223)

The direct involvement of Soil Conservation Service is not uncommon but really is not necessary to influence District action. Under normal conditions the Area Conservationists and District Conservationists have frequent opportunities to discuss District policies or the selection of new Soil Conservation District directors with the Directors. It is a common occurrence for most districts to lean on Soil Conservation Service personnel for advice concerning district affairs even though Soil Conservation Service employees are cautioned against getting involved in matters that are not of a technical nature.

The District members have limited contacts with organizations other than the Soil Conservation Service and other agricultural agencies who provide much of the information the District directors receive. The similarities in structures enables line officers in the Soil Conservation Service to communicate with officers in Soil Conservation District associations and conveniently promote programs in areas for which they have mutual interest and responsibility.

This monopoly on the supply of information controls the way directors view different situations; although no information is intentionally suppressed. The Soil Conservation Service informally recognizes

accomplishments and bestows status on certain District directors who promote policies in harmony with the Soil Conservation Service's philosophy. Conforming Soil Conservation District directors are given prepared speeches, letters, evidence to support their proposals, compliments, praise and publicity for their "good work".

Directors who have views in conflict with the Soil Conservation Service can be ignored.

The knowledge that employees must stay on the good side of Soil Conservation District directors is known at all levels and looms very heavy over employees at the field level who are expected to maintain close contact with the directors.

The formal structure of the Soil Conservation Service describes the relationship that different employees are supposed to have with each other and with the Soil Conservation Districts.

The informal structure is used by Soil Conservation Service personnel to direct District efforts in the desired direction. This informal structure is constantly changing to generate new communication networks, status and positions of power. The informal structure changes as Soil Conservation District directors attain leadership positions in the state, regional and national associations and as directors strengthen their political ties to state and national congressmen and political leaders. If this informal structure is observed to be

heading in the desired direction, it is strengthened by its use as a channel for sending information by those who want to promote certain policies or gain certain advantages.

The District directors are carefully taught how to exercise their political influence at each level by the Soil Conservation Service and the association staff members at the national and regional levels.

A weekly newsletter full of political advice is written and signed by the president of the National Association of Conservation Districts and is mailed to all District directors.

The Soil Conservation Service has a multitude of services it provides to landowners. The close association of Soil Conservation District directors to the Soil Conservation Service provides the directors with an advantage in recognizing where technical and financial assistance is available and also in securing this assistance.

Has the Soil Conservation Service been able to avoid Capture?

The Soil Conservation Service would appear to be particularly vulnerable since agency capture is most likely where an agency is dealing with a single interest constituency. Rural landowners who are mostly farmers make up the majority of the members of Soil Conservation

District bodies. McConnell also believed that Soil Conservation Districts chosen to represent small units, i.e. landowners in a county, could hardly be expected to effectively represent issues of national interest. McConnell states that representatives chosen in small, local units such as Soil Conservation Districts, owe their allegiance to narrower points of view held by their constituents. (McConnell, 1970, pp 108-9)

Rourke also explained that this type of relationship could degenerate until the interest group advances their own interests at the expense of the general public. (Rourke, 1978, p.232)

McConnell points out that it is more probable that a general interest in conservation of natural resources will come from a large diverse constituency than one whose members represent small homogeneous groups such as farm communities.

The Soil Conservation Service does channel most of its programs through the local Soil Conservation Districts but it does not necessarily promote the status quo because it does not offer the programs to the Districts carte blanche.

The Soil Conservation Service does not provide many opportunities for Soil Conservation Districts to comment upon state and national Soil Conservation Service plans and objectives.

Districts are always given the opportunity to comment upon Soil Conservation Service plans for their area and the Soil Conservation Service usually honors any specific request made by Districts in regard to specific problems; however, Soil Conservation Service managers commonly establish state goals and set priorities independently of Soil Conservation Districts. When District views are solicited, it is more often than not on local issues or from a list of predetermined Soil Conservation Service goals and objectives.

According to the enabling legislation, the Soil Conservation Service was to become an action agency and get conservation practices applied on the ground and work with all segments of the rural population. The Soil Conservation Service has become an action agency and has a remarkable record of providing on site assistance to landowners by helping them build farm ponds, drain wet soils, install contour strips, plant trees and windbreaks, and carry out other practices that protect natural resources. None of the literature and none of those I interviewed indicated that the districts had limited the Soil Conservation Service's conservation achievements. On the contrary, all of the evidence supported the position that Districts have helped the Soil Conservation Service achieve its mission.

There has been a multitude of programs that have recently been instituted by the Soil Conservation Service that did not benefit the Districts directly. Many of these programs required considerable amounts of Soil Conservation Service time and resources. Some of these programs include the Inventorying and Monitoring program carried out by field personnel to determine the extent and condition of our soil and vegetative resources. Another program is the Resource Conservation Act which is designed primarily to determine the preferences of the general public for conservation activities and the effectiveness of these various practices.

Another program is the River Basin Studies which primarily benefit the non-agricultural interests but nevertheless requires considerable time inputs from Soil Conservation Service field personnel.

The Soil Conservation Service on several occasions has tried to establish a more diverse clientele. In 1979, the National Association of Conservation Districts passed a resolution urging the establishment of Urban Conservation Committees. The resolution was designed to encourage local Districts and the Soil Conservation Service to focus attention on urban conservation problems. Soil Conservation Service personnel were encouraged to expand their clientele. Field personnel were encouraged to work with urban

interests such as developers and planning and zoning commissions, schools on conservation education and recreational developments. The Soil Conservation Service later decided to give these activities low priority and most of these services have been drastically curtailed or eliminated.

The Association of Conservation Districts at all levels has always been supportive of the Resource Conservation and Development program even though this program has required the time of skilled Soil Conservation Service technicians that had formerly been assigned to help farmers with their problems.

Soil Conservation Districts have also supported the Soil Conservation Service in surface mined land reclamation. Where mining was occurring, assistance to strip miners usually becomes one of the Districts highest priorities.

There is only one exception that is documented where Soil Conservation Districts opposed a program the Soil Conservation Service thought was important. In the 1980's the Soil Conservation Districts have vigorously opposed the Soil Conservation Service's efforts to shift its resources to targeted high erosion areas. Soil Conservation Service emphasis on targeting has subsequently been cut back due to District's lobbying efforts with the congressional Appropriations Committees and the resulting language in the appropriations bill. I have not found any other instances in which policy has

been changed or otherwise influenced by Soil Conservation Districts. It is probable that Soil Conservation Service personnel, in states that did not qualify for targeting funds, encouraged the Soil Conservation Districts to oppose the targeting program. The District actions may have resulted to a large extent from a division in the ranks of the Soil Conservation Service rather than from a desire on the part of the Districts to change a goal the Soil Conservation Service thought was important.

The Soil Conservation Service's original mission was to work through Districts set up on natural watershed boundaries. The Districts were established under county boundaries rather than watersheds because the state advisory committees and state legislatures did not want to offend the county governments. There is no evidence that Districts influenced this decision. In each location where counties were chosen, the decision was made prior to the formation of Soil Conservation Districts and precluded their opportunity to influence this decision.

The original mission of the Soil Conservation Service was to become the technical arm of Soil Conservation Districts who were to administer a set of land use regulations. It has been my experience that the Districts have been more inclined to act as enforcers of land use regulations than the Soil Conservation Service. During the 1970's, urban units

of government throughout the eastern United States adopted a set of conservation practice standards and corresponding land use regulations but the Soil Conservation Service declined to assist Districts or other units of government with the enforcement of these regulations. However, according to Jerry Keller, Deputy State Conservationist for the Soil Conservation Service in Michigan, in the mid-western states, "Districts have been very reluctant to assume any type of regulatory authority. In these states, Districts view themselves as administering a voluntary soil conservation program. They believe that free technical assistance and cost-share assistance to install conservation practices will encourage landowners to sufficiently protect the natural resources." Even though this seems to be a contradiction, I do not believe it is. On the contrary, I believe it simply demonstrates the willingness of Districts to adopt the Soil Conservation Service view point even though the Districts in certain sections of the United States had views different from the Soil Conservation Service.

The Soil Conservation Service has been partially successful in preventing agency capture because it goes to great efforts to control the environment in which most decisions are made and

does not provide many opportunities for state and national decisions to be changed.

The Soil Conservation Service goals and objectives for conserving our natural resources are fairly uniform throughout the United States. Erosion control is given a high priority wherever erosion problems exist. In the western states, water conservation is also given a high priority. There is little evidence that local interests significantly impact the program emphasis even for district conservationists. Most Soil Conservation Service employees point out to District directors that they have a small amount of discretionary time for which they are open to suggestions. The District directors may then be invited to direct how the District Conservationist uses this discretionary time within the framework of what the State Soil Conservation Service views as accepted activities.

The programs that are developed at the national level are implemented uniformly across the United States. A few of these programs originate at the state level but more often their origin is in the national office.

Current movements by Soil Conservation Districts
toward Model #1.

The type of clientele agency relationship represented by Soil Conservation Districts has pressure constantly placed upon it to move toward model #1 as

described by Bernstein. Soil Conservation Districts are encouraged to become autonomous, develop their own power base and establish their own objectives, policies and programs independent of the Soil Conservation Service. This is happening because of the following:

(1) Many Soil Conservation Service personnel promote complete Soil Conservation District autonomy because they believe that autonomous Districts will provide more support for the Soil Conservation Service rather than less. They perceive that autonomous Soil Conservation Districts will spontaneously and consistently choose to support the Soil Conservation Service and its programs, policies and objectives and because they are autonomous, they will have more strength and be more enthusiastic in all of their efforts.

(2) The demands for Soil Conservation District services require more time and independent actions from the directors.

(3) Soil Conservation District staff are increasing and want their own careers and responsibilities independent of the Soil Conservation Service.

As the Soil Conservation Service's role diminishes, Soil Conservation Districts are beginning to play a new role. Districts are steadily increasing their staff. A few states are starting to provide modest salaries for their directors. Soil Conservation

Districts may ultimately change their priorities from supporting the Soil Conservation Service to that of promoting their own growth and development.

The National Association of Conservation Districts has consistently supported requests for increased federal appropriations to the Soil Conservation Service but has recently begun to request national grants to Districts as well.

It is probable that if Soil Conservation Districts become a typical unit of government, the directors would begin to use their energies and resources to promote their own growth, develop their own power base, and their own stature. It is probable that alliances with other agencies would develop that would require District's energies and resources to the point that it could weaken or destroy the bond between the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts. An increasingly large set of policies and guidelines would accompany the need for increased appropriations to enable Districts to function independently. A controlling hierarchy would likely be formed to regulate the expanded role of Districts and the increased need for funding. Directors would draw salaries and career ladders would need to be established for District employees. The Soil Conservation Districts would then become another competitor for Soil Conservation Service clientele.

CONCLUSION:

The relationship between the Soil Conservation Service and the Soil Conservation Districts resembles model #2. The Soil Conservation Service is composed of a group of experts. The Soil Conservation Service and its allies are the primary supplier of information for Districts. In subtle ways, the Soil Conservation Service is able to control a large part of the District communications. The Soil Conservation Service also has a highly organized and complex set of points where it can influence the Districts and their associations. The District directors do not feel compelled to follow any particular course of action dictated by the rural landowner clientele they represent. The Districts do not impose many of their objectives, goals or programs upon the Soil Conservation Service; however, the Secretary of Agriculture, USDA, supplies many of the objectives, goals and programs adopted by Soil Conservation Districts which are channeled down through the Soil Conservation Service.

The double lines of authority imposed by the traditional Soil Conservation Service hierarchy and the informal authority of the Soil Conservation Districts has both advantages and disadvantages. The local employees have the job of trying to please two masters. They also have the protection, increased flexibility and effectiveness provided by the Districts. The field

level personnel are stimulated to a limited extent by Soil Conservation Districts to make the national programs more practical and to allow for flexibility to adapt national programs to local conditions.

The Soil Conservation Service has been able to avoid some of the problems that normally occur as a result of an agency working with a single interest clientele. The Soil Conservation Service has been able to do this because it exercises a lot of influence over the organized segment of its clientele--the Soil Conservation Districts.

The Soil Conservation Service has been able to survive with its present small clientele but there are signs of problems ahead. As the Soil Conservation Service struggles for survival, much of its energies are siphoned off to solve budgetary problems rather than to produce innovative new programs and policies. Solving existing erosion problems rather than concentrating on prevention is given the highest priority because of the Soil Conservation Service's perceived need to win legislative support.

The Soil Conservation Service needs to expand its programs into areas that are popular with both congressional leaders and the public. Perhaps the Soil Conservation Service should research those activities, programs and policies which generate the greatest public response in its favor. Perhaps The Soil Conservation Service should abandon its

conservative approach and assume duties involving more risk such as those of regulating soil erosion and agricultural pollution of clean water.

The Soil Conservation District directors provide a valuable service to the Soil Conservation Service and their mutual clientele; however, this symbiotic relationship is established on a precarious position. The Soil Conservation Districts can function as both lobbyist for the Soil Conservation Service or as a separate agricultural agency. As the Soil Conservation Service role is diminished, Districts are encouraged to expand their role in the conservation of our natural resources. There may come a time when Districts and their State and National Associations become viable agencies who compete for their own growth and development, and quit trying to expand the national legislative authorities, programs and appropriations of the Soil Conservation Service.

A second remote possibility is that Soil Conservation Districts may move toward the type of agency clientele relationship described by Bernstein in model #1. In this event the Soil Conservation Service could be captured in the classical sense and become unable to work for the collective good of the general public.

It is doubtful that the Soil Conservation Service could survive without the Soil Conservation Districts. The real danger lies in the fact that many

of the Soil Conservation Service personnel do not fully understand the delicate arrangements upon which this relationship depends. In reality a game is being acted out between the Soil Conservation Service and the Soil Conservation Districts.

The players can lose on both sides if they fall into a trap of believing that normative values and formal rules are directing how the game is played. The Soil Conservation District directors have been, for the most part, willing to suppress their own preferences when they were in conflict with Soil Conservation Service goals and objectives because of the directors fondness for Soil Conservation Service personnel and their satisfaction from the other benefits derived. They have been willing to do this even though they have the power and authority to force their preferences upon the Soil Conservation Service.

One area in which the Soil Conservation Service needs help is in overcoming problems of rigidity. An agency that is representative to its clientele must change unless the environment in which it operates is extremely stable. The agricultural and non-farm environment under which the Soil Conservation Service operates is constantly changing. The formal structure of the Soil Conservation Service is not able to process information efficiently enough to

be representative of the public's interests. Top level Soil Conservation Service employees have the power and authority to institute significant changes; however, top level employees are not close enough to the outside environment to design policies that meet their specific clientele's needs at a county level. Some pressures outside the agency are needed to provide top level officials with the information and motivation for making these changes. The Soil Conservation Service relies on the Soil Conservation Districts to design and communicate these needed changes.

This unique relationship has held together because both the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts find each other to be mutually beneficial.

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