# Soil Conservation Service
# Landscape Resource Management[1]

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Abstract: SCS Landscape Resource Management (LRM) is the application of landscape architecture to SCS conservation activities. LRM includes but is not limited to visual resource management. LRM can be summarized in three principles: (1) SCS landscape architecture considers the landscape as a composite of ecological, social and visual resources; (2) SCS landscapes exist in the countryside or suburban setting rather than in wildland or wilderness; (3) The American public has expectations of country-side landscape resources that most likely differ from their expectations of all other types of landscapes.

## INTRODUCTION

To understand the concept of landscape resource management devised by Soil Conservation Service (SCS) landscape architects, it is necessary to understand the agency--its mission, its public, its methods of technology transfer, and the broad range of programs and activities within its sphere of authority.

SCS was created in 1935 and has been charged to provide information, technical expertise, and a delivery system for assisting land users with the conservation and use of soil, plants, and woodlands; watershed protection and flood prevention; the conservation, development, use, and disposal of water; animal husbandry; fish and wildlife management; recreation; community development; and related resource uses. Unlike other federal agencies, SCS does not control or manage public lands. Rather, the agency seeks to influence land users, through technology transfer and education, to use the best available conservation and resource management practices.

SCS operates primarily in countryside and suburban landscapes through a delivery system consisting of about 3,000 field offices. These offices are situated throughout the 50 states, and field personnel work in a diversity of landscapes ranging from Northeastern marshes (for cranberry production) to the semiarid Southwest plains (for fiber production).

Some SCS activities (construction of dams and channels) have potential for disrupting the landscape, while others (erosion control, reclamation of abandoned mine lands) are directed toward rehabilitating derelict land.

In either case, SCS recognizes its role in improving environmental quality through conservation of the landscape resource. It is USDA's belief that "... America's actions in the 1980's regarding food-and-fiber and natural resources policies may well have the strongest influence in shaping the society and the landscape of the next century" (USDA 1979).

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[1] Presented at the National Conference on Applied Techniques for Analysis and Management of the Visual Resource, Incline Village, Nevada, April 23-25, 1979.

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## LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN SCS

All of these factors collectively require SCS landscape architects to deal with the landscape resource as a broad concept. SCS landscape architecture can best be explained through discussion of several principles.

1.  SCS landscape architecture considers the landscape as a composite of ecological, social and visual resources (SCS 1975).

This approach differs from visual resource management systems primarily in its contextual consideration of social resources. Such social consideration includes an analysis of benefits, both direct and indirect, derived from landscape use.

Countryside and suburban landscapes differ from resource lands controlled by federal agencies in one major respect: the former are generally the site of continuous human habitation and activity. Landscape resources must be analyzed in terms of public perception of them and of their functional use. For example, a fencerow planting in the Midwest may be valuable as a visual resource because it adds diversity and contrast to an otherwise monotonous landscape, but is also provides definable benefits such as wind protection, dust control, etc. These benefits cannot be ignored when impacts of potential management activities are assessed.

2.  SCS landscapes exist in the country-side or suburban setting rather than in wild-land or wilderness.

SCS only infrequently deals with wild-land landscapes. Human-modified landscapes, whether countryside or suburbs, are generally dominated visually by structures, patterns of human activity (e.g., roads and terraces), and patterns of visual resource elements.

The impact of management activities on all visual resource elements is assessed within a local context. For example, in the New England countryside, red barns often have local significance as landscape resources. The introduction of structures that are visually incompatible with existing structural elements may be unacceptable.

SCS projects and activities also occur on a broad spectrum of landscapes of diverse size ranging from windbreak plantings on several acres to agricultural land conversions on 60,000 acres. General procedures and methods for dealing with the entire spectrum can be outlined, but the landscape resource management plan must he prepared for a particular site in a local or regional context.

3.  The American public has expectations of countryside landscape resources that most likely differ from their expectations of all other types of landscapes.

The historical development of the American countryside has created public expectations and perceptions of regional landscape resources. SCS landscape architects are concerned with learning the basis for these expectations, the elements that comprise scenic countryside and the degree of change that can be absorbed by countryside without destroying its traditional character. Examples of traditional landscapes are the cotton plantations of the South, tobacco farms of the Piedmont and wheat fields of the High Plains.

## THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

These observations form the base on which a broad, landscape resource management system is being formulated. The system will not be rigid. The diverse programs of the agency and the variety of landscapes in which the activities occur require a flexible approach. This approach is composed of three major efforts: preparation of technical information, training aids and workshops, and field testing of methods for landscape resource appraisal.

SCS Technical Release 65 (TR-65), "Procedure to Establish Priorities in Land-scape Architecture," is an initial attempt to develop a system for identifying critical landscape resource management problems. TR-65 will be followed by a series of other documents to present additional levels of landscape resource investigations. Technical material is also being produced as integral parts of design manuals for specific structures such as open channels and farm ponds.

The major emphasis in the first year of SCS landscape resource management development has been in the area of training field personnel. A large portion of the training is accomplished through self-contained audio visual training modules. Module 1, "Awareness" is currently being used in area, state and multistate workshops nationwide.

To date, field testing has been limited to studies in Mississippi and Massachusetts. The Mississippi experience consisted of a landscape resource inventory on a county scale that identified areas of important visual resource quality. The Massachusetts program inventoried resource areas (including visual) in several local communities. A "Q" sort method was used to judge local performance for various scenic resources.

It is anticipated that more extensive testing will be needed to determine the typical components of countryside landscape and assess the public's perception of these components.

LITERATURE CITED

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