

RIO DE PENASCO WATERSHED PROJECT

David J. Jones^{1/}

A Search for a New Land Use Development Pattern

This is an attempt at comprehensive planning of a small watershed by State and Federal agencies and private organizations sponsored by the State Planning Office. I want to present just the schematics - the planning approach.

These slides give you an image of the Rio de Penasco watershed: 300 square miles in a high water yield section of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range just south of Taos. A population of 7,000 is scattered through 12 Spanish American villages, and the Picuris Indian Pueblo.

For many years it has been one of the economically depressed or a lagging area of Northern New Mexico. What solutions have been proposed for this problem? One is to let it deteriorate, then replace it with something better. Yet when you ask, "What do you mean by something better?", the answer is not convincing.

Is it possible that this area is economically depressed because money people evaluate this land and the people in it in the following ways:

- a. The land is cut up into small tracts either by ownership or steepness of the terrain and is thus unsuited for agriculture. This is true if your stereotype is the large flat tracts of land in Kansas or at Bluewater, New Mexico, and you think only in terms of machinery now available.
- b. The amount of water available is not great and it fluctuates in volume. Therefore, large scale industry or agricultural development is out.
- c. There is no large consumer market here. This precludes input-output schemes such as building a suburb---then a shopping center---enlarge the suburb---expand the shopping center.
- d. The land titles are those more typical of Latin America. They do not meet the standards derived from Anglo-American practices; consequently the people cannot get the kind of loans ordinarily available.
- e. There are no railroads - no super highways; therefore it is unsuited to industry in general. The image in the mind of this appraiser is Detroit, Los Angeles, Camden with heavy transportation facilities, abundant water, rich sources of raw materials, close proximity to manufacturers of components and sub-assemblers, ready markets and sources of trained labor.
- f. The forest is not extensive - does not produce high quality timber. Therefore, the large scale lumbering such as in the Northwest is out.

^{1/} U.S. Park Service, Chairman for the Inter-Agency Committee for Area Development, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

g. The people are "different." Development projects based upon Anglo-American values are not necessarily those endorsed enthusiastically by Spanish Americans or Picuris Pueblo Indians.

What is the result of this kind of evaluation of land and people? There is no investment. Whereas the people of uplands New Mexico were once successful in a barter-purely agricultural economy, they fail today when they try to compete in a dollar economy. Culturally this is an enclave. What is the impact of this money approach? It makes them feel at a tremendous disadvantage and they see no way of getting out of their situation. They have no way of producing money in the volume required. If someone offers them some in the form of welfare or relief, many of them readily accept.

The only resource now becoming scarce elsewhere that is abundant in the Penasco area is land which is habitable, attractive, sparsely populated. Here on this land, already in existence, is a way of life that is the verbalized ideal of many of us living elsewhere in the high density population centers. What can we do to remedy this problem? EITHER: We do nothing and let the area become a recreation place. People more and more will move in whose income is not tied to this landscape; residents will derive few of the benefits. The inevitable population sprawl will engulf the area, destroy every vestige of its culture and much of the landscape. OR: We develop new measures for the potential of this land.

In the Inter-Agency Council there are people interested in developing these new measures. They ask, would it be possible to develop a pattern of culture here which does these things:

- a. Supports more people.
- b. Enriches rather than depletes the soil, perhaps by making extensive use of forest waste products.
- c. Conserves and makes more efficient use of water in the area.
- d. Turns the agricultural character of the land to advantage. The production of chili for example, could be greatly expanded if processing facilities were improved to meet interstate requirements.
- e. Takes advantage of the most recent development in light rapid transportation...since there is no tax burden from heavy transport investments... to establish communication with markets, sub-assemblies and suppliers.
- f. Turns the need for small cash income to advantage for small, light industry that can be developed with little capital.
- g. Uses handcraft and handcraftsmen as the basis for cottage industries.
- h. Encourages growth and change by developing upon the sound cultural values that already exist.
- i. Explores uses of resources, growing of crops new to this area.

Objectives such as these have been or are being achieved in this country and elsewhere. For example, the growing and harvesting of agricultural

and forest product crops has been brilliantly solved for certain kinds of terrain and climate, but not here. Techniques and machinery for it have been well developed. Can the problems here be approached with same creativeness used elsewhere. Can this become an area of opportunity for smallness as opposed to bigness, for initiative instead of dependence...a place for people without large amounts of capital, but with energy and ideas?

How could this type of planning and development be accomplished? There is a great emphasis upon the use of private consultants today. In Federal, State agencies and private organizations there is a surprising amount and variety of land-use planning talent that never appears on the consultant market. In the watershed are individuals and groups who are venturesome and want to work with the participating agencies and organizations. Bringing these elements together on a planning and development project presents hazards. Very competent people have tried before us, and, for various reasons failed. We say the need is great and that we have modified the approach and maybe it will work this time.

To achieve the real cooperation of the various agencies and private organizations is absolutely essential. We have organized the Inter-Agency Council for Area Development Planning. Twenty Three State and Federal agencies and two private organizations are participating. We have adapted the River Basin approach to a 300 square mile watershed. It is a small enough area so that everyone can get to know it. It is close at hand. Differences of opinion arise, but if you can get out on the job to reach decision, the problem will often speak for itself in a way it never does in a central office.

The Inter-Agency Council has designated a nine man committee to direct the project. The planning and investigation is carried out by five work groups, namely: Croplands utilization, Forest and Range Utilization, Utilization of Community and Cultural Resources, Enterprise Facilitation, Socio-economic studies. The chairman of these groups have broad authority to act. By having State and Federal agencies as well as private organization in the project we think we have thrown off-balance the bureaucratic tendencies in each of us long enough to get something done. Already we have found the value of having individuals who know land-use problems and who are not connected with any agency. They can speak up when agency representatives cannot, since it is not cricket for one agency to criticize another. The potentialities of this approach are considerable: A wide variety of planning talent can be brought to bear on a problem. The agencies or individuals who will have to finance and carry out a project will have ample opportunity to assess its merit. Situations such as this bring out the venturesome qualities in otherwise conservative agencies and individuals. Relatively big things can be done with relatively small amounts of money.

The people of the Penasco watershed are the most important element in the solution. It all depends upon their cooperation. We are not attempting to appeal to the entire population, just the venturesome ones. To them we think we can demonstrate that ideas and energy create wealth. We believe there is a greater number of venturesome people living along the Rio de Penasco than you would believe, and that they will identify themselves.

Assistant Secretary of the Interior, George W. Abbott stated yesterday the need for a single, integrated plan rather than a multiplicity of plans by separate agencies. I think the Penasco project will demonstrate one way to achieve this.

Mr. Abbott felt, however, that the degree to which you have more than one agency determining what is to be done in a given area is the degree to which you dilute the effectiveness of the result. With this I take issue. We have found that the State and Federal agencies are concerned with the need for cooperative research, planning and action. We are all convinced that this cooperation can be achieved at the given area level sooner and more efficiently than it can be in Washington. Furthermore; the success of the whole effort might well depend upon the comprehensiveness of the initial planning and the subsequent development. Here lies the advantage of multiple agency participation. It provides comprehensiveness that could not be achieved by a single agency. There are too many facets to the problem for the limited talents available in any one agency.

I have attempted to outline schematically our approach to the Penasco project. If you have questions you may call upon me or any of my very able associates who are in this audience: George Worley of the Pack Foundation for watershed Conservation Education; E.J. Dortignac of the U.S. Forest Service; Earl Sorenson of the State Engineer Office; Charles Collier of the New Mexico Land Planning Association; Donn Hopkins, Acting State Planning Officer; or Peter Van Dresser who was Field Director of the project. If one can say that any single man is responsible for conceiving and organizing this project, it is Mr. van Dresser who deserves the credit.