



Today and Tomorrow: A Vision to Conserve South Dakota's Natural Resources

Every man, woman and child in South Dakota enjoys the benefits of our natural resources. We drink clean water, eat safe food, breathe clean air, and enjoy abundant wildlife; in general, we live in a healthy environment. Many of us take this for granted and assume it will always be this way. We often forget that, as we enjoy the benefits of nature, we are also responsible for seeing that our children and grandchildren have the same opportunities.

It is easy to say we are responsible, but how do we carry out that responsibility? What can we as individuals do? *"Today and Tomorrow: A Vision to Conserve South Dakota's Natural Resources"* creates a framework of opportunity that encourages all South Dakotans to voluntarily participate in caring for our natural resources. This document purposely includes broad goals that promote local flexibility to address natural resource priorities and objectives. Everyone can help to accomplish the goals through their own actions.

When we implement *"Today and Tomorrow: A Vision to Conserve South Dakota's Natural Resources,"* we demonstrate our commitment and leadership to making South Dakota a better place. We continue South Dakota's tradition of working together to solve challenges and create opportunities.

"Today and Tomorrow: A Vision to Conserve South Dakota's Natural Resources" takes a common sense approach to natural resource management, seeking to ensure their sustainability for home, for industry, for agriculture, for recreation, and for other uses. It will lead to a cleaner environment and a better quality of life for all citizens.

**As South Dakotans, our mission is to
conserve, develop and enhance South Dakota's
natural resources for the benefit of all.**

Goal: Improve the environmental, social, and economic values of the Missouri River and its watersheds in South Dakota.

Everyone lives in a watershed. The watershed can be as small as the area that drains into a tiny creek. That tiny creek then drains into the larger river watershed which then, in most of South Dakota, drains into the Missouri River watershed. Only the Red River and Little Minnesota River watersheds in northeastern South Dakota are not part of the Missouri River watershed. The Red River flows north into the Hudson Bay. The Little Minnesota becomes part of the Mississippi River watershed. The Mississippi River is part of the Gulf of Mexico. It is all a matter of degrees.

The Missouri River is a lifeblood for South Dakota. But, trying to address its issues all at once is more than we can handle. We can solve the puzzle, though, one piece at a time. A comprehensive planning process would develop a plan for addressing the smaller watersheds that comprise the Missouri River watershed in South Dakota. We can build our knowledge base while addressing the needs. We all have a stake in this and we all need to be part of the solution.

Goal: Protect and/or improve the waters to provide sufficient quantities of quality water for beneficial uses.

Water has many uses ranging from drinking to fishing to swimming to irrigation to wildlife habitat to livestock watering. Not only must the water be good enough to meet these purposes, but there must also be enough of it. Our choices affect our water quality. We must choose to use best management practices that enhance our water. These practices could include, but are not limited to, grazing systems, conservation tillage, streambank stabilization, grassed waterways, tree plantings, terraces, strip cropping, nutrient management systems, etc.

Goal: Improve the productive quality of our soil.

Soil provides a foundation for not only our agriculture economy, but also road and home building, tourism, and industry. It is a dynamic natural resource that is biologically active because it contains millions of living organisms.

Soils, like people, are most productive when they are healthy and fit. The health of a soil affects its ability to support plant and animal life, maintain or enhance water and air quality, and support human health and survival.

Goal: Improve air quality.

Statewide, the air quality is relatively good but there is room for improvement. Our air quality in various areas of the state could be, on any given day, affected by blowing dust, road dust, unpleasant odors, industrial output or natural events occurring halfway across the world.

Airborne pollutants are measurable solids, liquids, or gases that can negatively impact our environment. Odor is subjective; what is offensive to one can be of no consequence to another.

Our dependence on carbon-based fuels affects our economy and our environment. Our increased use of alternative energy sources could not only improve our local economies, but also our global air quality.

Goal: Enhance recreation opportunities and wildlife habitats.

South Dakotans treasure their wildlife and recreation. We invest a lot of time and energy discussing how to achieve the optimal balances.

When all interests “come to the table,” we have a chance to listen to each other and learn to appreciate all viewpoints. Then we can potentially come to a consensus. The key to success is participation, whether it is as private individuals, business or governmental agency.

“Great achievements are not born from a single vision, but from the combination of many distinctive viewpoints. Diversity challenges assumptions, opens minds, and unlocks our potential to solve any problem we may face.”

Goal: Increase public awareness of the benefits of natural resource management.

It is hard to support that which you don't understand. Before we can ask the public to support natural resource issues, the public needs more than a vague understanding of the benefits of natural resource

management. The public needs to know the specific benefits. Then we can talk about the issues and how to best address them. We also need to integrate the economics of ecology. Conservation pays and we need to show how.

Goal: Increase financial opportunities for natural resource management.

Given current funding levels, we cannot meet the record demand for assistance for natural resources. The National Governors Association estimates that at least \$5 billion is needed annually in government assistance to significantly improve the natural resources management system in the US. Increased investment in this system will make the world better for our children and grandchildren.

Is our state and local investment adequate? Consider this: the three state agencies responsible for natural resources management in South Dakota (Agriculture; Environment & Natural Resources; and Game, Fish & Parks) comprise 1.5 percent of the State's annual budget. The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts estimates an additional 112 technical staff and \$7 million annually are needed to help put conservation "on-the ground" in the state.

Increased state and federal are not the only answer and may not provide long-term solutions. Local initiatives to address local issues as part of a regional cooperative effort will provide the most effective long-term opportunities for natural resource management.

Some call this the "Age of Philanthropy." Not only have private individuals and organizations opened their pocketbooks at record levels, but they have also volunteered their time and expertise, thereby leveraging further dollars. Creating more opportunities for giving toward natural resource issues is critical.

CLEAN. CLEAR. CONSERVATION.

Under the leadership of the Conservation Commission and the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, Inc., seven public meetings were held in 2000 to gather input from as many interests as possible. Representatives of each meeting volunteered to serve as a working group to compile data and identify issues of concern. Local conservation district supervisors prioritized the identified issues in 2001. The Conservation Commission and the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, Inc. drafted this document outlining seven goals for South Dakota. More than 230 groups and individuals were invited to review and comment. These groups included local, state and federal agencies; tribal governments; state and federal legislators; commodity groups; environmental organizations; business groups; and interested individuals.