

SJR

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TO: Members of House Committee on Resources

FROM: Senator Coghill

RE: Soil conservation budget cuts

Soil and Water Conservation Programs will be cut drastically in fiscal year 1986 and 1987. Alaska will bear the brunt of many of these cuts as we are still a developing state. Much of our soils have not been surveyed, our resources uninventoried. The rationale behind much of the cuts is that the the work has been accomplished. That may be well and good for California or the Midwestern farm states, but Alaska is not in the same situation.

The programs which most effect Alaska include soil surveys, snow surveys and watershed planning and construction.

Anticipated cuts will result in the loss of about nine local conservationists. The state does not have the staff to make up for these positions.

The following is an excerpt from the FY1986 Budget Summary for the United States Department of Agriculture:

"Snow Surveys and water forecasting provide a valuable service to water management groups responsible for over 10 million acres in the Western States and Alaska for

irrigation, flood control, recreation, fish and wildlife power generation, municipal and industrial water supply and water quality. It is not an essential activity to support the Federal-State-local conservation technical assistance program. Snow survey work can be continued by private or public organizations serving the areas primarily benefitting from this activity."

Snow surveys are important to our river areas. They give an indication of the potential run-off and flooding. The Interior received 200 to 300 percent more snow than usual this winter. The assistance of the soil and water conservationists can not be overestimated for the upcoming years. Watershed planning and construction, including river basin surveys and flood prevention will be terminated during 1986. The U.S.D.A. claims these programs have a lower priority for Federal funding in the conservation areas. It believes that states should take over these functions if the services are beneficial. Presently we do not have the staff to take over these functions and probably will not be able to by the 1986 termination date.

Resource inventories and analysis will be updated in 1985, but further analysis will be scheduled for some time in the 1990's. As a developing, changing state our resource areas must be inventoried so we make prudent decisions based on as much data as possible. Timely resource inventories will assist our public officials toward this goal.

Soil surveys basic services will be continued, but will be provided as needed. Project mapping will be done on a priority basis where the soils information is urgently needed. The mapping of Federal Service and

Bureau of Land Management will be discontinued. All the agricultural land in Alaska has been mapped by this service. Our soils are extremely fragile. We can not afford to lose these vital services.

The Federal-State-Local conservation incentive assistance

program is being

administered by the

Department of

Interior, Federal and State Lands including

the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

and the State of Alaska, Department of Land and

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SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS
(Program Level in Millions)

<u>Agency/Program</u>	<u>1984 Actual</u>	<u>1985 Current Estimate</u>	<u>1986 Budget</u>	<u>1987 Budget</u>
Soil Conservation Service:				
Conservation technical assistance	\$275	\$272	\$285	\$160
Soil surveys	54	54	51	36
Plant material centers	4	4	4	4
Resource inventories and analysis	18	18	11	-
Snow surveys	4	4	3	-
Great plains conservation program	21	21	7	-
Watershed planning, construction .	245	230	93	-
Total	<u>621</u>	<u>603</u>	<u>454</u>	<u>200</u>
Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service:				
Agricultural conservation program	190	190	--	--
Other cost-sharing programs	40	21	--	--
Total	<u>230</u>	<u>211</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>--</u>
Total, SCS & ASCS Conservation .	<u><u>\$851</u></u>	<u><u>\$814</u></u>	<u><u>\$454</u></u>	<u><u>\$200</u></u>

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

The budget provides \$200 million and 5,000 staff-years for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) for 1987. This level is about one-third the funding and staffing level appropriated for 1985. The transition year of 1986 will reduce employment by approximately 9,300 employees at a one time cost of \$254 million. ASCS Conservation cost-sharing programs are discontinued also. Over the five year period 1986-1990, the budget proposal would yield savings of \$2.8 billion compared to a continuation of SCS and ASCS program at the current level.

While the 1986 program and budget proposal is heavily influenced by fiscal policy constraints, it also reflects 1) the outlook that the economic incentives to devote marginal, erosion-prone land to row crops will be lessened once the Administration's commodity program legislation is enacted, 2) the general policy that Federal programs of financial assistance to individuals and state and local units of government should be cut back, especially in those cases where economic incentives (existing non-federal institutions might come more significantly into play in the absence of current levels of Federal assistance, and 3) the general recommendation from the Grace Commission that major economies could be achieved by limiting federal staffing in conservation district offices.

April Snow Survey Report

By Roger Boyer
U.S. Soil Conservation Service

Snow survey has shown some interesting facts this month. Many people felt that the high winds and warm temperatures which we experienced in March were probably reducing the overall snow pack and moisture levels. Observations made at the end of the month do not verify this.

Snow packs and moisture levels throughout the area have increased either slightly or, in some cases, dramatically. Tok and Fielding Lake are the only areas with snow pack moisture levels near average. The heaviest snow pack, relative to long term averages, is at Shaw Creek Flats, where moisture levels at over 250 per cent of normal. There are nearly seven inches of water laying on the ground. This breaks the snow pack moisture level record. The Delta-Clearwater area increased slightly in snow depth and moisture, going from 23 inches to 25 inches of snow, and from 4.8 inches to 5.2 inches of water in the snow pack.

What all these numbers mean is that there is a great deal of water laying on the ground in the form of snow. If break-up is delayed by continued cool temperatures in April, it should probably be a very wet and muddy spring.

Homes and other buildings in or near low areas or intermittent water courses will probably experience flooding for longer periods of time than is normal.

If, however, temperatures are warm in the daytime and drop below freezing at night, break-up should be gradual with little more flooding and muddy conditions than is normally expected.

Area snow packs are approaching those that were present in the springs of 1968 and 1971, which are the highest for which we have records. If you lived here during those years and have a good memory of what happened in the spring, you may have an insight of what could happen this year. In both of those years,

the snow pack lasted late into the spring.

I flew over the area where the Jarvis Creek Overflow channel begins and saw a sizable collection of aufeis, which blocks the main channel of Jarvis Creek and causes the overflow flooding. With the significantly above-average snow pack of moisture in the area, there is a strong possibility for substantial flooding along the overflow channel this year. Residents who live along or near the normal flood route should be thinking of what they intend to do to protect their property and to maintain access during the flooding period.



The key point to remember is that if break-up is rapid the chances for severe flooding are greatly increased. But if break-up is slow and occurs over a long period of time, excessive flooding will probably be avoided. A final note -- we would be interested in hearing from anyone in the community who has good records or a good memory of the years of 1968 and 1971, as far as snow conditions and spring flooding are concerned. Give us a call at 895-4241, or stop in at the SCS office in the Jarvis Office Center.

April 1 Snow Survey Data

	Depth (Inches)	Water Content (Inches)	Record Water Content (Inches)	Years of Record	Percent of Average
Granite Creek (Mile 1410)	25 (16)	5.2 (3.2)	7.0 1971	18	162
Fort Greely	24 (19)	5.4 (3.3)	7.2 1967	19	150
Shaw Creek Flats	28 (14)	6.8 (2.7)	6.0 1971	26	252
Gerstler River	23 *	4.9 *	" "	3	"
French Creek (Salcha)	40 (27)	11.5 (6.0)	12.1 1971	24	192
Little Salcha (Salcha)	35 (24)	10.1 (5.1)	10.5 1971	24	204
Tok	16 (10)	3.3 (3.4)	6.0 1967	20	97
Mentasta Pass	39 (29)	10.7 (6.0)	11.4 1979	24	178
Chlatochina River	28 *	6.3 *	" "	1	"
Haggard Creek (Sourdough)	33 (27)	7.5 (5.7)	13.3 1979	22	132