

Watershed Development in Iowa, 'Example of a Fine Relationship'

By Don Muhm

THE State Soil Conservation Committee periodically takes to the air—via helicopter—to review watershed development work in Iowa. "You get a better perspective on things from the air flying at low altitudes and at slow speeds," explains William H. Greiner, director of the State Department of Soil Conservation. "A helicopter trip is the best means available to see a lot, see it well and do it all in a short time."

The newly-expanded conservation committee this fall took a one-day helicopter tour of central, western and northwestern Iowa in an aerial inspection of watershed projects. The state conservation committee itself is a blend of Iowans representing rural, urban and government, as well as specialists in soil conservation work and in the area of the state's natural resources. This committee is charged by state law to respond to local requests for watershed development, and to work with U.S. Soil Conservation Service technicians in mapping out a plan to combat soil and water erosion, damage to property through runoff water and other problems created when water is not kept under control.

LAND ABOVE THE STREAM MUST BE PROTECTED

Under a new Iowa law, passed this year, the conservation committee has been expanded, and a series of six watershed "conservancy districts" will be established. The plan is to develop conservation on the land in line with the major river-draining areas of the state—the Iowa and Cedar River valleys, the Skunk River and Des Moines River valleys, the northeast Iowa area, as well as western and southern Iowa.

A watershed project generally is the elite form of soil and water conservation—a master plan where protection against erosive forces related to water runoff is put to use. For a watershed project to be started, officials require that land above the river or stream must be protected by terraces, grassed waterways, strip-cropping and contour farming and the like. Then the watershed itself can consist of a series of earth dams, farm ponds, diversion terraces and other installations which cause the water to "walk" instead of "run" down the slopes.

It takes from five to 10 years from the initial request for watershed development from local areas to become a reality, depending upon the severity of the problem, according to Greiner. The procedure is elaborate and detailed, calling for joint investigation and planning by various state and federal conservation experts and only after approval by the local farmers and property owners involved in the individual watershed project.

NINE WATERSHEDS COMPLETED AND 31 MORE AUTHORIZED IN IOWA

"Many people do not understand the teamwork represented in a watershed project," Greiner explained. "Some folks wrongly believe that watershed work is a case where a plan is ordered up outside of the local area and there is no local control. Nothing is farther from the truth. The initial request must come from a local area. Then the state watershed advisory board representing a variety of agencies and interests, as well as farmers, takes a ground tour of the area, visits with people and determines what action might be taken. Then a recommendation is made to the state conservation committee. If the committee approves the request, the watershed project goes on a waiting list and farmers and land-



GEORGE ANNAN of Clarinda, long-time conservationist-farmer, is chairman of the State Soil Conservation Committee which makes monthly decisions concerning watershed development and conservation work in Iowa. Annan was photographed in one of his terraced cornfields where the crop is planted on contour.

owners are encouraged to apply as much soil conservation work to their land as possible."

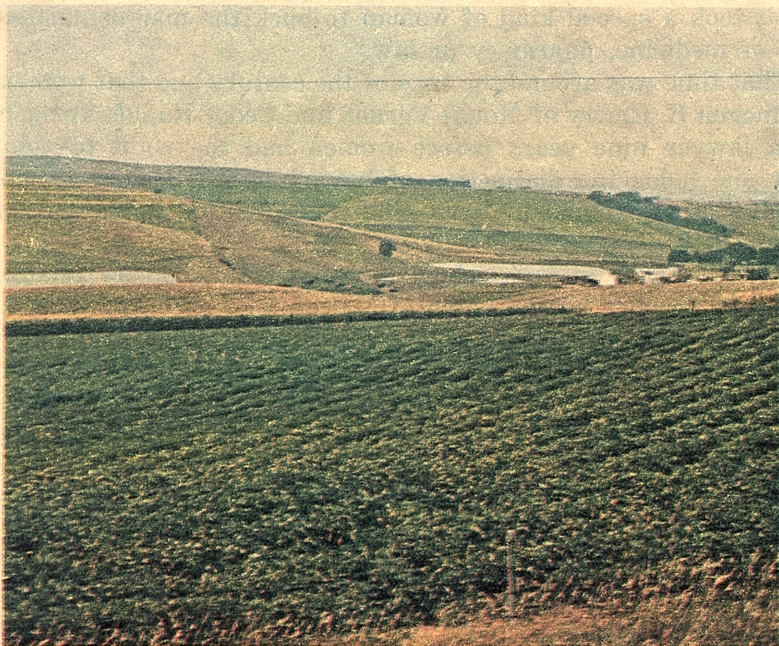
From this beginning, a watershed planning priority list is developed and eventually a plan developed. But again, the local people have the opportunity to approve or reject the plan. If the plan is approved, the request is submitted to the U. S. Soil Conservation Service which either initiates the project or seeks authorization from Congress if the project is a major watershed development. But local people must provide necessary land easements and rights of way, working through the local soil conservation district.

This detailed and lengthy procedure has been followed 110 times since the first watershed laws were enacted about 17 years ago. Nine watersheds have been completed in Iowa, with 31 more authorized and planning under way on nine others. Of the 110 requests, only five have been turned down by state conservation officials.

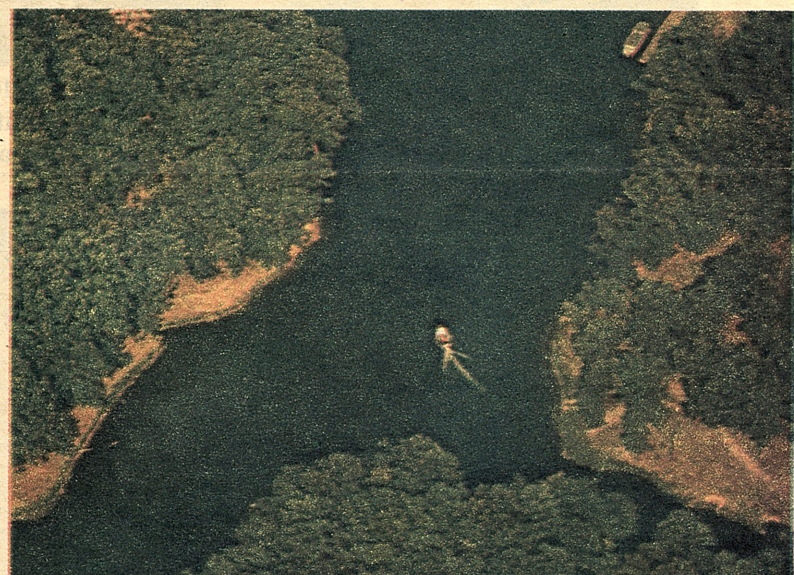
"The watershed project is a example of a fine relationship among local, state and federal people," Greiner said. "And each segment pays some of the costs involved.

"But the biggest voice concerning what conservation work is done comes from the local areas—the people who start the whole watershed development because they have a problem they want corrected."

MEMBERS of the newly-expanded State Soil Conservation Committee took time out during their 400-mile aerial watershed tour for the photograph at right. From left (kneeling) are Minoru Amemiya, representing Iowa State University; Othie R. McMurray, Iowa Natural Resources Council; Donald L. Johnson, Fairfield farmer; William Brune assistant state conservationist; Sherry R. Fisher, Des Moines banker, and J. Thomas Kenny, Akron farmer. In back are Eugene Swartz, Lenox farmer; William H. Greiner, director, State Department of Soil Conservation; Robert Lounsberry, Iowa deputy secretary of agriculture; Fred Cherry, Rowley farmer; Carroll J. Hobson, Eldora farmer; Gerald Norland, Cylinder farmer; Wilson T. Moon, state conservationist; and Richard A. Wilcox and Fred Higgenbottom, both of the State Department of Soil Conservation.



FARM pond arrangement at left was viewed in Ida County. It serves two purposes—preventing soil erosion and preventing pollution from feedlot runoff.



LAKE Panorama in Guthrie County typifies how recreation can be part of watershed development. View at right shows a small area along the west side of the lake.



NEW type of terrace now winning favor in Iowa is seen at left. Dirt is pushed up hill to shape terraces for more convenient farming, and tile is laid in soil to carry off surplus water once the terrace is filled.



AERIAL study of a Woodbury County cornfield (right) shows vividly how erosive "fingers" can reach up a hillside and steal precious topsoil from the land.