



NORM BERG COLLECTION

NEIL SAMPSON

I learned of Norm Berg shortly after starting my career in the Soil Conservation Service in Idaho in 1960. Norm had worked in Idaho before moving to the SCS Washington Office, and many people there knew him well and remembered him fondly. When he would come into the state to address an Idaho Association meeting, he was always among friends.

By the late 1960's, I was on the SCS State Office staff, working with issues of land use planning, assistance to local governments, and farmland protection, and in 1972, I was loaned onto Idaho Governor Cecil Andrus' staff to head up a state land use planning effort. As a result, I was involved in some of the issues for which Norm, as the Associate Administrator, was providing leadership in SCS policy and programs. In 1974, after a year spent studying at Harvard (also in Norm's footsteps), I was transferred to the Washington Office to provide staff assistance on land use and farmland protection issues.

Although I held a series of jobs within the Washington Office over the next four years, there was really only one job—to do whatever Norm Berg wanted done. Norm had an uncanny way of finding the staff help he needed, no matter what the organizational chart might say. And he was a delight to work for. You never had any doubt that you were working at the intellectual forefront of the agency when you worked with Norm.

Through one period, USDA was struggling to develop a land use policy, and Norm was the guiding hand, working at the side of the Assistant Secretary. Through many meetings of an interagency committee and many, many drafts, he kept the process moving forward. As for me, I kept the paper moving. That was before the days of modern word processing, and hammering out an interagency document across the Department was no easy task. Each agency representative had the opportunity to make their changes, and each change took the draft back to the start of the typing, editing, and review process again. But Norm's patience was endless, and eventually the effort paid off.

One time, in frustration, I complained that I didn't think we were getting anything done. His advice, which I have used many times since, was: "In Washington, your progress needs to be measured over many years. Be patient, keep working, and watch, and it will gradually show up." Norm has been the classic example of that advice. His contributions, usually in small steps, often made out of the spotlight, have continued to nudge the soil and water conservation program forward for many decades. I, along with many others, can proudly call him one of the most important and influential mentors in our conservation careers.