



NORM BERG COLLECTION

M. RUPERT CUTLER
FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

It has been some 27 years since we've seen each other, but my fond memories of working with you in the Carter Administration USDA will stay with me always. I was pleased to be asked by Ralph Grossi to share stories and reflections about your contributions to conservation for inclusion in a collection of your papers.

Because I was a political appointee of President Carter's and Secretary Bergland's and limited to the same term in office as the President, we did not have as many years to work together as you and many of your professional colleagues have had. Was it Dave Unger who introduced us? I can't recall now, but I know that my recommendation to the Secretary that you be promoted to Chief of the SCS was both a fine opportunity for me to support a national soil and water conservation program that truly protected the environment and a fine opportunity for you to lead a needed "mid-course correction" in the policy direction and priorities of the US Soil Conservation Service, now the NRCS.

At a staff meeting in July of 1979, Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland announced to his assistant secretaries that the new law creating the Senior Executive Service was in force and that among the new authorities it gave the Secretary and his program assistants was the power to replace agency administrators. I responded in the affirmative to the Secretary's question as to whether any of us wanted to replace an agency administrator, because the SCS Administrator I had "inherited" had consistently resisted my policy direction reflecting a change in presidents and President Carter's interest in working with private conservation organizations to care for the environment including fish and wildlife. In the eyes of the conservation groups, the SCS had become an upstream version of the Army Corps of Engineers, concentrating more on building dams and straightening streams ("channelization") than on keeping rain where it fell and protecting fish and wildlife habitats.

With the change in leadership of the SCS—that is, with the naming of Norm Berg as Chief—came an agency-wide sense of relief, pride and optimism that the SCS would be getting back on track to encourage private farm and forest landowners across the



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Tribute to Norm Berg (continued)

country to treat their land with care and respect in the sense that Aldo Leopold spoke of the ideal relationship of human beings to the land. You brought that stewardship attitude back into play and made it the mission of the agency. That made me very happy that I had a role in your success.

I'm sure you remember the day that the new Chief of the Forest Service, Max Peterson, and you met in my office and Max presented you with a pipe, the so-called "Chief's Pipe," because so many Forest Service chiefs had smoked a pipe. This was in recognition of the fact that we had decided to change the name of the SCS top position from Administrator back to Chief, as the first head of the agency, Hugh Hammond Bennett, had been called.

I cannot recall much detail regarding the specific issues you and I dealt with on my watch as Assistant Secretary, probably because my Deputy Assistant Secretary, Dave Unger, handled the day-to-day relationship for our office with the SCS as I was doing with the Forest Service and the Office of Environmental Quality in the Office of the Secretary. I do know that relations between the Department and the private conservation organization community (including the National Wildlife Federation in particular) improved quickly as your policy changes took effect.

Today I live in Roanoke, Virginia, in the Blue Ridge Mountains where I have served a term on the City Council and serve on boards of the regional water authority and the state conservation easement agency (the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.) At my insistence the City became a member of the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District. I am working to create a closer working relationship between the VOF and the NRCS so that landowners with conservation easements on their land will also have NRCS conservation plans on those lands as well as use forestry BMPs. So I continue to support good soil and water conservation practices, as I know you do in your retirement.

Congratulations on an outstanding career! Gladys and I wish you continued good health and send you our best wishes.