

Opportunities of the Conservation Section of the Oklahoma Academy of Science

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The possibility of a section within the organizational structure of the Oklahoma Academy of Science devoted to the general problem of conservation was broached during the annual business meeting of the Academy at Stillwater, December 6, 1952. The permanent secretary, Dr. A. O. Weese, pointed out that to accomplish this it would be necessary to follow the procedure prescribed in Sec. 2, Art. III of the BY LAWS of the Oklahoma Academy of Science.

Accordingly a statement of petition was prepared, which was signed by considerably more than the required number of twenty-five members. This was accomplished during the spring meeting following at Bolling Springs State Park, May 1, 1953. The signed petition thereupon was given to Dr. S. P. Massey, then president of the Academy, for appropriate action by the Executive Council. At the annual business meeting at Shawnee, December 5, 1953, the establishment of Section G, Conservation was approved.

The petition, which served importantly as a vehicle leading to the establishment of the present section concerned with conservation read:

"We, who have attached our names hereinafter, believe that a sound, purposeful, and progressive program for resource conservation in Oklahoma or elsewhere rests upon an adequate appreciation of the natural sciences together with a similar appreciation of the social sciences. We believe further, that the success of the conservation endeavor rests also upon an effective bridging of these two great areas of human interest, that is, the natural and the social sciences. It will be the specific purposes of the section proposed herewith to cultivate a broader public as well as professional appreciation of the natural and the social sciences together with the bridging of these toward the enhancement of the Oklahoma Conservation Endeavor."

This statement is deemed important since it keynotes the essential aim of this section, namely, to enhance the overall program of conservation in Oklahoma. Moreover, in its fountain-head, it recognizes the importance of an appreciation of a broad area of academic discipline together with the need for bridging these to effect a sound, forward looking state conservation program.

We are assembled today for the first official meeting of the Conservation Section. Whether or not this section achieves, through the years to come, a worthwhile destiny so far as the public welfare is concerned is a matter that rests with us and with our successors. This section can become a lackadaisical sort of entity. On the other hand, it has the opportunity to become a vital, leading, and constructive force in the way of life of our commonwealth.

Even so early as now, the Oklahoma conservation endeavor can tally a wealth of assets. Among these we can mention: the natural resources, including our people; interest, which to a limited extent is already organized and we have machinery in the form of secular and professional groups as well as governmental agencies. The one glaring liability or force negating a broad-minded, well factored, and integrated program appears to lie in a lack of effective leadership. It seems that no group within the state has yet been recognized as effecting this capacity. Someone must yet earn

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this recognition. Despite its tenderness of age, the conservation section is here presented with one clearly defined opportunity.

To the extent that conservation is a philosophy embracing attitudes toward: 1) the thrifty use of sub-human, vegetal and mineral resources, 2) the mental as well as physical welfare of our generation, and 3) the endowment of posterity with a heritage enriched both materially and spiritually by our efforts, to that extent conservation is a creed. Any creed is no more than an empty prattling of words except as it is implemented with sound and consistent deed. Here lies an opportunity to develop ways and means to instill among ourselves and our children a philosophy of conservation that will become as much a part of our everyday thinking as do already our religious beliefs, our attitudes toward economic thriftiness, and our American profession of patriotism.

Conservation is also a kind of practice. Many examples of this point can be cited. Some are obvious, others may not have been recognized in this light. For instance, the enforcement of anti-pollution or certain wildlife legislation probably will be readily recognized as a kind of conservation practice. The establishment of shelterbelts, working croplands parallel to the contour, or activities aimed to stem floods or impound otherwise wasted water also are readily recognized as conservation practices. Since the aim of medical practice is to conserve health, it, too, is a kind of conservation practice. To the extent that participation in religious rites imparts a sense of mental well-being or serenity, it is a conservation practice. Similarly the enjoyment of the world of nature in any or all of its several forms—plants, animals, or composite landscapes also is conservation in practice.

There is abundant opportunity for improvement in the area of conservation practice. There seems to be an endless succession of conflicting interests for one thing. Frequently the good one group accomplishes later is cancelled, because of the interests of another without any regard for those of the former. Sometimes the public interest is sacrificed to private interests. With a broader understanding and a practicing acceptance of the "Golden Rule," many such conflicts could be resolved mutually satisfactorily before becoming critical issues.

Aside from conflicts, some things done, even though popular, are ill-advised. This suggests a need for corrective measures, and likewise, furthers opportunity for this section.

Because of the potential both for increasing academy membership as well as for effective public service possessed by the conservation section, it could, among other things, become a clearing house. Ideas, needs, and problem solutions could be channeled here for consideration and appropriate action.

The appropriate action might be File 13. It might also be a legislative recommendation. It might be a research assignment. Or it might be a matter to bring to public attention. Serving thus, the conservation section's activities would be akin to those of a dispatching depot.

Among still other opportunities, which might be mentioned, there is yet one worthy of particular recognition. Mention was made above of the fact that there already exists in Oklahoma some machinery concerned with conservation. This machinery is of at least three sorts: governmental, professional, and secular. Is there not abundant opportunity to get these three segments more effectively meshed? Meshed so that all are working together as a team, and not like skitter bugs each going its own way? If this section through its efforts can engineer successfully just this task, then perhaps it may come to be looked upon as a leading force in Oklahoma conservation endeavor.