

THE WORKS PROGRESS PROGRAM

--Works Progress Administration--

For Release in Morning Newspapers
Wednesday, July 15, 1936.

Note to Editor:

The following statement on drought conditions in Montana was airmailed from Helena to Washington for distribution

By C. W. Fowler
(Deputy Works Progress Administrator for Montana):

Montana, battle scarred from struggles with drouth disasters in recent years, has been working out a program which will, in the future, minimize the effects of returning dry seasons, and Montana's Works Progress Administration is carrying on now at the front of the march toward better things for this enormous semi-arid dry area, third largest state in the Union, and embracing 147,000 square miles.

Not only drouth has come to ravage Montana, but, as is always the case in drouth years, pests are bearing down in violence which old timers say has never been previously equalled. Swarms of grasshoppers are eating up the forage on the range lands and moving in on the green alfalfa, grain and sugar beets in the irrigated valleys. Mormon crickets, ten times the size of the ordinary cricket and with the curious habit of traveling in great groups, are infesting certain regions. They are omnivorous eaters. Army worms and web worms are marching on the rapidly dwindling forage in other sections of the State.

To help fight these enemies the Works Progress Administration has set up state-wide grasshopper, cricket and worm poisoning projects, and WPA workers are enlisted to carry on the battle. Fifty carloads of bran have been purchased through the Works Progress Administration and shipped to various counties to be mixed with poison for grasshopper, cricket and worm destruction. Many additional cars will have to be distributed before the fight is won, and even though in many cases crops can not be saved, destruction of the pests this year insures fewer tormentors another season.

In this effort the Works Progress Administration is deploying its workers over an area half the size of Ethiopia in a manner best calculated to advance an extensive program of water conservation.

In recent years the State itself has been awake to the grave need for water conservation. During the Legislative session of 1933 there was created a Water Conservation Board to investigate and propose practical irrigation projects. The legislative session of 1935 made \$500,000 available to this board not only to further carry on its study and plans for projects, but to assist in the construction of smaller projects through loans to irrigation districts. But with so vast a State and so great a need, these combined agencies have made but a small start at the solution of the problem. For generations Montana's most reliable agricultural industry was livestock growing, and it is in assistance to this industry that greatest improvement and practical benefits can be obtained.

Water for stock on the sun parched plains is a problem in the drouth years. In this year, for instance, early spring was propitious. Considerable rain fell, and, moistened by winter snows, the ranges started a good crop of grass. With the coming of early dry weather what would have been otherwise a luscious crop of forage for cattle and sheep cured early throughout the plains and foothill regions, and water holes dried up under the blazing sun. Streams vanished which in normal seasons would have provided stock water in the arid districts, leaving thousands of acres of range land covered with dry but nourishing forage, unusable because it was too far from water for cattle or sheep to travel.

Seldom, however, is a spring so dry that between the run-off of the snow and the early rains, reservoirs constructed along them would not be filled to overflowing. These could provide bodies of water of reasonable depth and magnitude to last through the summer. So too, many times when the springs and the wells dry up in the great "dry land areas" as distinguished from irrigated valleys, water will stand throughout the season where reservoirs have been built, and reservoir water under these conditions is widely used for domestic purposes. In some districts where neither springs nor wells may be obtained, large cisterns are built and filled from artificial ponds or lakes when the water in the lakes is pure and cold in the early spring. These water supplies, carefully husbanded, last throughout the summer. Then too, many times where a reservoir of moderate size can be built along a stream or gully, water may be made available in sufficient quantities to irrigate a small crop, including garden vegetables, fruit trees, shade trees, and wind breaks, or perhaps provide a single irrigation to "carry the crop through" over a considerable area.

Thus an opportunity is presented to the Works Progress Administration to help carry forward the constructive task of insuring in the future reasonable prosperity for many a sheep and cattle ranch. One of the problems in a sparsely settled State like Montana where distances are great, is to establish projects of a worth-while nature in the isolated districts where but a few people live. Reservoirs in these localities make ideal projects. They not only provide the man with work but they give him likewise a chance for the employment of his team, which must be fed at considerable expense through the winter of drouth years where normally the natural prairie grass on the nearby range would care for them excellently.

And so with this class of citizen the Works Progress Administration offers an opportunity not only for the citizen to pull himself up by his boot straps, but also an effective means of keeping him from falling back so far with the recurrence of the drouth calamity. Montana's problem is not like the problem of the so-called "dust bowl". Montana is really a beautiful State and in normal years presents a tempting invitation to the settler on the "dry land". A writer once said, "Montana's green rolling hills beneath the summer sun are like the waves of a huge but smoothly running sea, the snowy peaks in the distance, the whitecaps where they tumble and splash against the clouds".

From 1907 to 1915 a great influx of "dry land farmers" came. Much of the best range land was plowed up, but from a farming standpoint this was marginal land and the average year would not sustain the homestead. The solution of Montana's problem is the return of the dry land areas to sheep and cattle growing, which means a reduction of the population of these areas, and the moving of this surplus population to irrigation projects along the rivers and streams. With the development of a generous water conservation program, which means further development of irrigation along the streams and the dotting of the range land with small lakes and reservoirs, there need never again be serious need for relief for any extended period so far as the agricultural population of the State is concerned. But these are great undertakings and a State with only a half million people and the limited finances it can command could never accomplish the objective unaided. So, with the object lessons of the drouth of 1934 and the sweeping destruction of 1936 clearly in evidence, Montana's Works Progress Administration is attacking that phase of the program to which it is adapted with a will and bending every effort to minimize the effect of recurring drouth seasons.

A State Planning Survey Project employing forty-seven persons was set up in January, 1936, to carry forward work previously begun under the Montana State Planning Board but which was unable to continue because of lack of funds. Workers on this project are compiling and making available in practical form much of the excellent material gathered by the Montana State Water Conservation Board, the State College at Bozeman, the School of Mines at Butte, the University at Missoula, the Soil Conservation Service, Engineer Corps, War Department, United States Geological Survey, United States Weather Bureau, Bureau of Reclamation, the Indian Service, and State, County and City governmental agencies. Thus the picture of the things best to do is being drawn and woven into a great and comprehensive plan for the rescue and rehabilitation of the State and its people. Water conservation is not the only phase of the program. Mineral and timber resources play their part. Unequaled recreational facilities make Montana a great possible future vacation land, the exploitation of which will bring millions of dollars to the State, but the most important and first essential is water conservation.

With an army of drouth sufferers becoming available for work on WPA projects throughout the State and with projects requested and approved for hundreds of small and moderately large reservoirs in all sections of the State, the way ahead is clearly marked. Projects are either approved or have been submitted for nearly 1,000 such work projects. Some have been completed, some are under way. Engineering crews are surveying and working out the plans for hundreds of others and a well designed and systematic project program is being worked out so that the greatest possible use of the available workers may be made, and when the work has been completed a great and tangible benefit will accrue to Montana.

An example of a little more ambitious project is the Valentine Blood Creek Dam begun under the old FERA program and recently completed by the Works Progress Administration. Although costing only some \$36,000 of WPA funds, this project located in central Montana was accomplished by the construction of a 1500 foot earth filled dam which submerged hundreds of acres of land and stores up water in the spring to be liberated gradually through the season controlling the flow of Blood Creek which runs through the center of an enormous range country, thus providing water for thousands of acres of range land which would otherwise be useless in dry seasons.

The most ambitious water conservation project undertaken by the Works Progress Administration is known as the Dead Man's Basin Project in the corner of Wheatland,

Golden Valley and Musselshell Counties in the central southern part of Montana. A great natural depression is being flooded by means of a canal some twelve miles long, leading the spring flood waters of the Musselshell River into the Dead Man's Basin where a lake four miles in diameter and impounding seventy-nine thousand acre feet of water will be created. By means of a dam and tunnel at the lower end, this water will be released through the dry parts of the season and will, for months, control the flow of the Musselshell River, providing stock water and making effective old irrigation projects for one hundred miles down the River--projects now only partly successful because the stream flow in the dry seasons is inadequate.

As a result of the work of the Planning Survey Project, one hundred sixty-seven projects which would range in size between that of the Valentine Blood Creek Dam and the Dead Man's Basin Project have been checked and mapped and are available as projects to the Works Progress Administration. Only a few of these larger projects probably can be completed within the coming year, but with principal emphasis on the small and medium size reservoir, for the construction of which projects have been approved on approximately two hundred sites and applications in for approval on some eight hundred more, there is ample to do, and although only the fates themselves can foretell the coming of future drouth years, there is assurance that much will be done to tide the rancher over the rough years, help him to preserve his foundation stock and carry on so that with the normally productive years he can be assured of an opportunity to prosper, and Montana's Works Progress Administration is taking full advantage of the opportunity presented to discount and minimize the effect of the drouth years of the future.

#####