DOCUMENTS ROOM

Northwestern University Library

JUL 27 1936

No. 4--1239

THE WORKS PROGRAM

***

--Works Progress Administration--

For Release in Morning Newspapers
Saturday, July 18, 1936.

Water Conservation Projects are Approved for Montana to Take Care of Destitute Farmers in Drought Area.

Seven new water conservation projects were under way today in the heart of Montana's drought area and 14 others are ready for operation, Works Progress Administration officials reported today to Howard O. Hunter, Assistant Administrator directing drought operations.

The water conservation program, surveys indicated, was the only alternative to a mass exodus of farmers from eastern Montana before the advance of drought and the ravages of grasshoppers and mormon crickets.

C. W. Fowler, Deputy Administrator of the Montana Works Progress Administration, advised, however, that ample work would be available to care for the destitute farmers.

The projects just begun are emergency stock water and small irrigation reserviors and ditches, all on public property and for public use in bone-dry gullies within a radius of 50 miles of Miles City.

Old timers of this and other cow towns emphasized the seriousness of the increasing feed shortage, however, recalling the "burner of '34" and adding: "As bad as she got then, there was no open talk of givin' this country back to the Indians, like they're talkin' now."

Olaf Nestley, a successful Montana stockman for 25 years, discussed conditions many are confronting on his ranch, some 20 miles east of Broadus in Powder River County. He still has 1,300 sheep and 80 head

Digitized by NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY Original from NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

of cattle. He has no plans for relocation, no defeatist attitude, but he tells a Works Progress Administration representative:

"I have no hay. My range will hold out for probably another month, and only that long by feeding ground grain stored from previous years. Then there will be absolutely nothing left to do but leave. My stock and ranch are clear of mortgages. I can borrow money to move and salvage something from what I have, otherwise if I try to stick it out, everything will be lost. I would rather move out than go on relief."

A banker in Broadus says:

"For the first time in the 19 years I've been here, I've been unable to raise or buy home grown lettuce or garden produce. This year every green vegetable we eat has been shipped in."

Dan Gaskell, a weather-burned old time cowman on Pumpkin Creek, 70 miles south of Miles City, also was known as one of the more successful ranchers of Powder River County. He had provided some small dams of his own in earlier years and they never had failed him, producing enough water for a light crop even in 1934, but this year even these proved inadequate, he reports. What little grass came up was harvested by the grasshoppers and another hundred acres, intended to produce hay, he added, "didn't even make good grasshopper forage." He has 350 head of cattle that are nearing the end of feed to be found on a scrawny range, with its sparse covering of dry, faded grass.

Others, with no livestock and no land of their own, are without even the slender resources of the ranchers, officials explained.

To meet this situation and provide protection against future drought, proposals involving 450 small stock water dams, costing an average of $1,500 each, have been submitted to the Works Progress Administration from Montana. All of the projects are sponsored by the State Water Conservation Board and

Digitized by NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY Original from NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

it is expected that additional dams will be started each week under the Federal Works Program until the major needs of the drought area have been met.

While estimates of the number of potential drought victims in the Southeast continued to mount, little likelihood of the existence of immediate suffering or hunger is seen, Malcolm J. Miller, Works Progress Administration field representative in charge of drought operations in the Southern States, reported. Mr. Miller is conducting a conference at Montgomery, Ala., today with representatives of the Works Progress Administration, the Resettlement Administration and other groups looking to a unified program of drought relief for that State.

Similar conferences have already been held in North and South Carolina and Georgia and others are scheduled early next week for Oklahoma and Tennessee.

"We can't tell about the actual number of people needing aid until our intake and certification machinery begins to function," Miller declared. "This service has already been started in the Carolinas and Georgia and should get under way here tomorrow or Monday.

"We will certainly have to increase our original quota of 20,000 for the entire region but by how much I am unable to say now.

"In the meanwhile, nobody is going hungry either in Alabama or any other State in this section. The full effects of this drought won't be felt for several weeks yet when the destruction of garden and vegetable crops begins to pinch and when the money for cash crops fails to materialize. By that time our Work Program for these people will be in operation and those really needing jobs will have them."

0-0-0

Digitized by NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY Original from NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY