

STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

BIG SANDY CREEK WATERSHED OF THE
TRINITY RIVER WATERSHED (AUTHORIZED)
Clay, Jack, Montague, Tarrant, and Wise Counties, Texas

1. Purpose

As State Conservationist, Soil Conservation Service, Temple, Texas, I am the responsible federal official for all SCS projects in Texas. The Big Sandy Creek watershed project in Wise, Montague, Clay and surrounding counties falls into this area of responsibility and as such it is my duty to conduct a continuing review to determine whether project plans are consistent with all pertinent national objectives, goals and policies.

Big Sandy Creek watershed is one of 53 subwatersheds in the Trinity River watershed which was authorized in the Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law No. 534, 74th Congress, as amended and supplemented. The plan was developed in August 1955 and approved for operations on February 1, 1956. The sponsoring local organizations for the project are the following:

Little Wichita Soil and Water Conservation District
Wise Soil and Water Conservation District
Upper Elm-Red Soil and Water Conservation District
Upper West Fork Soil and Water Conservation District
Clay County Commissioners Court
Montague County Commissioners Court
Wise County Commissioners Court
City of Bowie, Texas
Wise County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1

Work for supplementing the plan was begun in the mid 1960's when the sponsors recognized a need for additional measures to provide for greater protection of the resources in the watershed. Supplement No. I was

made in December 1971 to comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-646, 84th Stat. 1894). Supplement No. II was made in April 1976 to include land treatment measures necessary to stabilize critical sediment source areas on about 2,100 acres. Supplement No. III has just been completed to delete 6 of the originally planned floodwater retarding structures and add 37 floodwater retarding structures, 31 grade stabilization structures, land stabilization measures on 825 acres of critically eroded lands, and critical area stabilization measures on 1,455 acres of critically eroding areas in the LBJ National Grasslands.

2. Measures To Comply With National Environmental Policies

I, along with my predecessors, have taken the following actions during the plan development and implementation to insure that the Big Sandy Creek watershed project is consistent with all pertinent national objectives, goals, and policies.

The planned measures for Big Sandy Creek were reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on August 2, 1968 and a report of this study and recommendations for enhancing fish and wildlife resources was made. Later, these agencies made a followup review of the project measures and the watershed on October 18 and 19, 1976. A report was received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stating that they were pleased that all channel work had been deleted from the plan and that they would provide any other comments at time of review of plan supplement.

On August 5, 1974, an interdisciplinary team consisting of biologist, geologist, soil scientist, range conservationist, agronomist, engineer, and economist was assigned to proceed with updating the environmental assessment and gathering of additional data for the remaining planned measures in the Big Sandy Creek watershed. In addition to addressing to the environmental issues within their respective fields, the team consulted with federal and state agencies having expertise in pertinent fields in order to obtain needed data. Necessary arrangements were also made to obtain data on water quality and archeology through contracts with appropriate professional firms.

Public meetings were held on September 11, 1973 and again on February 26, 1976 to review the project, the assessments being made, and respond to any public concerns for the project.

The archeological surveys in the watershed were completed for all remaining planned measures in November 1977. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the surveys and findings on January 5, 1978.

On April 4, 1978, the decision to prepare an EIS for the Big Sandy Creek was published in the Federal Register. The draft EIS was sent for interagency review and for review by other groups on October 23, 1978. The availability of the draft EIS was published in the local newspapers on November 9, 1978 and in the Federal Register on November 14, 1978.

All comments and views on the draft EIS were carefully reviewed and evaluated during this process. A special meeting was held with the U.S. Forest Service on December 14, 1978 concerning a recommendation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that all structures on the

federal land administered by the U.S. Forest Service be fenced. The results of this special meeting and the response to each of the comments received is contained in the CONSULTATION section of the final EIS. Changes made in response to appropriate comments are reflected in the final EIS which was transmitted to the Environmental Protection Agency on February 23, 1979. The notice of availability of the final EIS was published in the Federal Register on March 12, 1979.

Additional comments on the final EIS were received from the Department of the Interior questioning the responses made in two areas of concern on the draft EIS. These questions and concerns were not of a serious nature and were answered in a reply to the Department.

3. Conclusions

After having carefully reviewed the proposed Big Sandy Creek watershed project in light of all national goals and policies, particularly those expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act, and after having evaluated the overall merit of possible alternatives to the project, I have drawn the following conclusions:

- a) That the Big Sandy Creek watershed project, as presently supplemented, designed and authorized, employs reasonable, and practicable means consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act while permitting the application of other

pertinent national policies and interests. These means include, but are not limited to, project planning and design that will result in the least adverse effect to the natural environment and still provide for the objectives of the sponsors and of the project.

- b) That the review of the proposed plans for the Big Sandy Creek watershed project was made using a systematic, interdisciplinary approach involving natural and social sciences and environmental design arts and that the results of this review were the basis for my conclusions and recommendations. Additionally, I find that all conclusions concerning the environmental impact of the remaining project were based on a review of all existing data and information that could be reasonably obtained which would reveal all the significant consequences of the proposed project. These data included additional studies prepared specifically for the project and the views and comments of all interested federal, state, local agencies and others interested in the project.
- c) That every possible effort was made to assemble a complete picture of the environmental impact of the Big Sandy Creek watershed project, and that effort has been made to identify those adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided if the project is constructed as presently planned and authorized.
- d) That all reasonable and viable alternatives to the proposed action were considered, studied, and evaluated with reference to goals

and policies. After evaluating the possible alternatives, I found that some tend to protect more of the present intangible amenities than the proposed project will preserve, however, no alternative exists that would achieve a reasonable level of erosion control and flood protection at a lesser environmental cost or with a lesser commitment of resources.

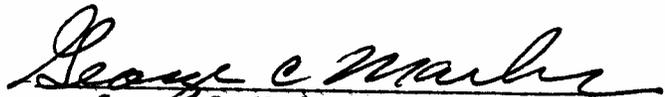
- e) And finally, that the proposed project will be the most effective means of meeting the national goals and serving the public interest.

4. Recommendations

Having concluded that the proposed Big Sandy Creek watershed project employs all practicable means, consistent with other essential considerations of national policy, to meet the goals established in the National Environmental Policy Act and that the project will thus serve the overall public interest, I, recommend that the Big Sandy Creek watershed be completed as presently planned and authorized.

APR 20 1979

Date



George C. Marks
State Conservationist
Soil Conservation Service