

Spotlight

He Believes In Conservation And Moves Now To Larger Role

BY FLORENCE GILKESON

His eyes light up when the word is mentioned.

Conservation. "I believe in it completely. It's just grown on me," said Charles L. Whitaker.

The man who has served Moore County as district conservator for the past three years has left his county duties, and on Monday he assumed broader responsibilities in a new program. He is the first coordinator of the new Region H Resource Conservation and Development Program, a job which moves his headquarters from Carthage to the B.L. Goodman Building in Rockingham.

Whitaker will still be serving Moore County, but he will also be working with Anson, Richmond, and Montgomery counties, all of which make up Region H. As RC&D coordinator, he will be working with a regional council and with councils appointed for each of the four counties. The regional council is composed of one county commissioner, one municipal officer, a county planning board member, one member at large, and one Soil and Water Conservation Board member.

"Our objective is to improve the development of natural resources in the region, and in so doing, to improve social and economic conditions. The council has charted this course," he said. On a broader level, the council will focus on soil resources, water resources, business and industry and community facilities, forestry and agriculture. D.C. Deaton, mayor of Biscoe, is chairman of the regional council.

Planning will take up most of Whitaker's time in the first year and a half, but he expects to see tangible results after he and the council have developed a plan design for the entire region.

Right now the work is being handled by committees appointed to concentrate on each of the five broader areas of need. It will take three or four months for these committees—the nucleus of the RC&D program—to determine the most critical needs and to incorporate them into a plan design.

After the plan design is developed, the council will work on an area plan, and Whitaker expects it to take a year and a half to pull it all together.

Then the more colorful, the more visible part of his work will begin to show—after the planning is completed, the needs documented and priority areas delineated.

Projects will follow the planning stage, and these may be as simple as stabilization of school grounds or as far-reaching as land reclamation and community water supplies.

At this point in the RC&D program, projects are all hypothetical, but Whitaker can envision some of the ideas which may eventually become reality.

Development of a 50-acre lake as a water-based recreation project is one definite possibility for Region H, most particularly including Moore County.

Such a project would be multi-purpose, providing fire protection, irrigation, a community water supply as well as recreation. Water is needed in key areas of the Sandhills for agriculture, recreation, and wise industrialization.

Through the RC&D program cost-sharing assistance is available through the United States Department of Agriculture and other agencies. Participants in such projects could share in the cost.

Whitaker said that USDA can provide 100 percent funding for the costs of surveying and designing a lake facility, 50 percent for land rights, 50 percent for installation of the main water lines, and 50 percent for a pumping station.

"The beauty of the RC&D program is that it's not run by the government. It's run by the council and the committees who do the planning, with help from the people in their communities," Whitaker explained.

As RC&D coordinator, he will be working for the Soil and Water Conservation Service, not Pee Dee Council of Governments, as was stated in a recent news article about Whitaker's resignation. And although Whitaker was hired for the job and is paid by SWCS, he will be working with and for the RC&D council and the constituents of the four counties.

Whitaker said the council welcomes suggestions and ideas from anyone in the region.



Charles L. Whitaker

"We will listen to any request, and we'll do our utmost to implement it," he promised.

"This is the best thing that's ever happened to this region, because of the organizational structure and the key people on the council. These are people with vision and definite goals for improving the region," he added. Whitaker has plenty of ideas of his own.

He has visited school campuses and observed critically eroded areas. He has seen abandoned landfills which are eyesores and contribute to the pollution of streams. He knows of highway road banks which are eroding, damaging highways and contributing to the sedimentation of streams.

"Until now we have had no program to offer help for these problems. School ground stabilization is definitely a high priority. Now there is cost-sharing available for reclamation of landfill areas. We can find funds to plant grass and stabilize road banks, prevent the sedimentation of our streams, pollution of our reservoirs, and fish kills."

Not all of the council's assistance will be financial, of course. Where funds are not available, the council can help by giving endorsement to community plans, by offering planning, direction and support.

The Garner native has been associated with Soil and Water Conservation Service since 1967.

A graduate of North Carolina Agricultural and Technological University at Greensboro, Whitaker earned a Bachelor of Science degree and later pursued graduate study toward a Master's degree. He worked as a soil scientist trainee in Owensboro, Ky., then as a conservationist in Leitchfield, Ky. and Greenville and was district conservator in Rockingham before accepting the Moore County position in 1978.

The Whitakers—including his wife, the former Elaine Morgan of Clayton, two sons and a daughter—make their home in Aberdeen.

Mrs. Whitaker teaches first and second grades at Cordova Elementary School. Mark, 14, is a band member at Aberdeen Middle School. Marion, 12, also attends Aberdeen Middle, and Chuck, 7, attends Cordova Elementary.

Whitaker is a member of Trinity AME Church, Southern Pines. He is a Mason, a member of the Sandhills Community College Advisory Council, and the Aberdeen Middle School Advisory Council. He is a past president of the Rockingham PTA.

He is an active member of the Moore County chapter of the A&T Alumni Association and the Soil Conservation Society of America.

The county-wide soil survey, just getting started, is regarded by the conservationist as one of the major projects initiated during his stay in Moore County.

"I feel this will mean a great deal to the county in years to come. We will have the resource material to make sound decisions. A person wanting to buy land will be better educated about what can and can't be done on that land. I am very proud of the soil survey and the role played by the county commissioners. They really had the people at heart when they moved ahead on the survey," he said.

The soft-spoken conservationist is modest about his own accomplishments, but those who work with him recognize his value. In the past year he has been responsible for bringing prestigious state awards to Moore County. The biggest was the designation of the Harry N. Scott family of

In his three years in Moore County Whitaker has noticed an increase in citizen participation in the conservation program. There are many people here with a strong interest and understanding of conservation, people who are vitally concerned about conservation of natural resources, he said. He has observed this through the growing number of invitations for him to speak to civic clubs and other organizations.

"Urban people are beginning to realize that what goes on down on the farm affects city life, and they are concerned. This is positive and the way it should be," he declared.

Music Program Is Presented At AARP Meet

The Sandhills Community College Choir presented a program of music, sacred and spirituals, at the May 19 meeting of Moore County Chapter, AARP, Church of Wide Fellowship.

Many of the selections were sung a cappella. Those with music background were accompanied at the piano by Barbara Williams and Charles Garner.

Frances Wilson is director of the choir. Ensemble members are Paul Baswell, Hannah Bue, Tim Cameron, Rebecca Davenport, Judi Davis, Charles Garner, Bill Harris, Carolyn Jarratt, Daniel Lamonds, Diane Maness, Alzira Mason, Christine McKeithen, Joy Nason, Laurie Paul, Pag Wiggins, Larry Wilson. Chapter president Carl W. Chancey, Jr., presided at the meeting. The Chapter will meet again June 16, their annual picnic at Whispering Pines Rescue Squad building at 11 a.m.

Visitors are welcome and can obtain additional information about the Joy (Just Older Youth) Club meeting by calling 692-3612.

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The Whitakers have not decided whether to move to Rockingham. They may decide to stay in Aberdeen. It is easy to see that a move would be difficult.

"I have been impressed at the way I was accepted in this county and how harmoniously the people have worked with me. It gave me a lot more enthusiasm and interest and even confidence to push and get my job done. I'm grateful for their cooperation," he said.

Joy Club

The regular monthly meeting of the Joy Club will be held on Monday, June 8 at 6 p.m. The meeting place is the Education Building of the Page Memorial United Methodist Church in Aberdeen.

After a covered dish meal, Derry Walker, public relations director of Moore Memorial Hospital, will outline a program that benefits senior citizens in Moore County.

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