

To the Jones County Taxpayers: Re - Jones County Watershed Improvement Tax

Early this spring a meeting was held at the Jones County courthouse in regard to drainage and soil conservation work. There were officials from Army Corps of Engineers at Wilmington, and Soil Conservation and Water Resources Commission officials were present.

After this meeting the County Commissioners asked for an act of the legislature to form a countywide watershed, to further authorized the commissioners to levy a tax of 25c per \$100.00 property valuation, and to give the commissioners Power of Eminent Domain.

This action was rather hasty and the Commissioners later learned that there was considerable objection to such a special benefit tax and to their having Power of Eminent Domain.

As a result, at a recent meeting of the County Commissioners, the board authorized a special election so that the voters might decide if they wanted to pay this special tax and if the voters wanted the commissioners to have the power of Eminent Domain.

There is always a difference of opinion, and we consider this wholesome, but let's look at the facts:

1. We are already heavily taxed. At this time when our net income is further reduced, more tax would be undesirable. When the new valuation goes on the tax books, any increase in property valuation will reflect a corresponding increase in the watershed tax. For example: If your property valuation is increased from \$100.00 to \$200.00, the watershed tax will be just doubled the amount.

(2) The Army Corps of Engineers has indicated, at least tentatively that it will clean out the river from New Bern to Trenton. This will be at no cost to us on a county level.

(3) Apart from natural forces, the primary cause of flooding is the drainage canals that have been constructed over the past twenty years or so. The large timber companies have done most of this work. We would like to see the State College-Hoffman Forest Foundation practice some of this conservation that we hear so much about. Farmers tell us that these canals in effect, are flooding their croplands.

(4) The needs and the program most desirable for the individual property owner are so variable that it would not be in the best interest of the property owners to incorporate them into one county unit.

(5) The Power of Eminent Domain Act should cause us grave concern. Over the years we have loved and respected our professional agricultural leaders. They have counselled with us in our homes and on our farms regarding our many and complex problems. In short, they have been one of us. This work has been done on a very high level, leaving the freedom of choice strictly with the individual farmer. We would hate very much to see this close relationship destroyed by invoking the Power of Eminent Domain, for there is a tremendous difference in a relationship where there is a free flow of ideas in an educational process and in one of cold power where the directive must be blindly followed.

In this referendum we are requested to buy a program that has not been planned, to confer power to do certain work without a blueprint of what is to be done. We feel that the property owners should have a voice in any such program rather than give the authority to a few individuals.

Let's think seriously about the fundamentals involved and get out and vote our convictions in the July 3, 1965 election.

The Jones County Citizens Committee

BEFORE YOU VOTE ON JULY THIRD, ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1. Do you want to commit yourself to a more than 12½% increase in taxes which with the revaluation now taking place in Jones County could become a 25% increase, or even more?
2. With the present emphasis on cutting tobacco production and considering the trouble in our tobacco program, is this the time to saddle ourselves with a large tax increase, designed to be used primarily to increase the yield of tobacco?
3. Is this the American way of doing things, to tax every property owner in the county to take care of the drainage needs of a few? Wouldn't it be a more democratic way for those farmers who need drainage improvements to get together in small groups and accomplish this with the help which is already available from Federal and State funds?
4. Why is an attempt being made to tie the project to clean out Trent River from Trenton to New Bern for recreation, in with the Soil Conservation Project for drainage improvement in the upper end of the County? We have been told at a meeting in Trenton that cleaning out the river is a project for the Army Corps of Engineers and is in no way contingent on the Soil Conservation Project. Why?
5. Do you really believe, as you are being asked to believe, that when this project is completed, no crop in Jones County will ever again be hurt by an excess of rain?
6. Why are we being told by the proponents of this project that they have deleted from the program the power to condemn property, (which Power they at first requested), when those favoring this project are frank in admitting that the project could not be completed without giving to the County Commissioners, or their agents, the power to condemn and seize property needed to complete this project? Do you want to give this kind of power to a local board, which may or may not be impartial in dealing with friends and neighbors?
7. Finally, ask yourself, do you want to commit so many of the future dollars which you hope to earn to a program about which you have been told very little, and the cost of which no one, even the so-called experts, will even attempt to guess? Would you go to a store and buy an item, no knowing its price or its worth, and agree to make payments on this item for the rest of your life?
8. Once a tax is imposed, have you ever seen that tax removed?

WHAT WILL THIS PROJECT COST YOU?

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The Army Corps of Engineers has estimated the cost of cleaning out Trent River alone at **THREE MILLION DOLLARS**. This would not include any tributaries, canals, ditches, dams, etc. For a comprehensive watershed improvement program to be initiated over the entire county it is a conservative estimate that the cost would be at least **TEN MILLION DOLLARS**.

The maximum proposed tax of 25¢ on the \$100.00 property valuation, applied to the total taxable value of Jones County of **TEN MILLION DOLLARS** would only provide (\$25,000.00) **TWENTY FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS** annually for the special tax.

Jones County's part of 25% cost of the project would be **TWO AND ONE-HALF MILLION DOLLARS**. The **INTEREST ALONE** on this amount would be (\$100,000.00) **ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND**, leaving us short **SEVENTY FIVE THOUSAND** on paying the interest.

JONES COUNTY MUST MAINTAIN THE PROJECT ONCE IT IS VOTED IN. WHERE WILL THE MONEY COME FROM IF WE CANNOT EVEN PAY A PAYMENT ON THE PRINCIPAL AND CANNOT GET ENOUGH FROM THE TAXES TO PAY THE INTEREST?

**WHO WILL REALLY BENEFIT FROM THIS PROJECT?
DO YOU WANT THIS PROJECT FOR YOUR COUNTY?
IF YOU DO NOT VOTE AGAINST IT ON JULY 3RD.**