

LOYALTY of the DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

by Wayne Lukert, Chairman
District Operations & Resolutions Committee

My first loyalty, as a conservation district supervisor, is the conservation district. The district is paramount. There is no exception. Push comes to shove, the district comes first. I have a fiduciary responsibility to the employees of the district, just as I have a fiduciary responsibility to the district. But my fiduciary responsibility to the district supersedes any secondary responsibilities.

The conservation district must be able to sustain its programs and activities within the resources allowed it. It is my fiduciary responsibility to ensure that this happens. It would be negligent on my part, as a supervisor of a conservation district, to approve policies that affect the district without a clear and thorough understanding of their consequences.

Conservation districts in Kansas, although subdivisions of state government, do not enjoy all of the benefits of other units of state government. We have a definite limited budget, subject to the whims of state and county governments. We cannot even rely and guarantee our funding from year to year. We hope to sustain and grow our programs, but this is only a hope. We do not have the option of automatic pay raises for our employees. We do not have the option of automatic cost of living advances for our employees. We must consider every year what we can and can't do to sustain the operations of the district.

Each year, the board of supervisors for the conservation district must make decisions to balance the needs of the district with the funding available to the district. We constantly try to avoid the point of diminishing returns. If we pour all the resources into activities and programs and not have the trained personnel to deliver the programs and manage the operations, we are in chaos and fail to be effective as a district. The same can be said for devoting too many resources to personnel that there is no funding left for other necessary operations. We need try assure that funding of all aspects of operations (personnel, programs, activities, material) be funded in a sustainable way. We do not want to have to cut any of these things because we did not consider wisely the consequences of our actions.

The conservation district supervisor must accept and cope with a paradox that is frustrating. We must compete with federal, state and county agencies for resources and personnel. We cannot compete with federal, state and county agencies for resources and personnel. The glaring example of this is compensation of employees. We do not have the funding to compete with other units of government. This is a fact that most of us understand. It is a fact that a lot of us cannot deal with. But it is reality. The best way to deal with this reality is to accept it and try to do the best one can under the circumstances. That is the only way to deal with it.

Granted, there are undoubtedly alternatives that could change the situation. In the meantime, accept reality. Pursue alternatives but do not ignore reality.