

The Role of State Committees in Developing a Conservation Education Program*

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The author has attempted to ascertain the role of the state committees in the various states by means of a faculty research project from 1956 to 1958 which took me into all of the states except Rhode Island for a series of one-day conferences with state officials. The report of this research is now completed and available from the Dept. of Conservation at the University of Michigan. A summary of the portion of the research dealing with state committees forms the basis for the presentation in this paper.

REASONS FOR STATE COMMITTEES

1. The majority of state committees come into existence when the Department of Education needs a bulletin prepared. The State Superintendent usually appoints this committee with someone from his staff to work with it in developing the materials. The life of such committees is usually from one to two or three years. Thirteen states have had or still have such temporary committees. They are: Delaware, Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.

2. Some twelve states have more or less permanent committee arrangements to develop and guide a state program in conservation education. Sometimes these are general curriculum committees which include conservation, such as in Tennessee, but more frequently they are set up with the primary emphasis on conservation, although they may be tied in with the general curriculum committee structure as in Michigan. In fact in Michigan the need for a conservation committee many years ago gave impetus to the formation of other permanent committees in the Department of Public Instruction.

These permanent committees are able to be of much greater service to a state when they can go beyond preparation of bulletins, valuable as that is. They can help design projects and programs, organize state and regional conferences, work with the colleges to stimulate in-service training, prepare needed materials, and coordinate efforts of consultants who work with schools and colleges. Likewise, they can evaluate various programs and activities and help schools and colleges

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evaluate their programs.

Wisconsin has used such a permanent curriculum committee continuously since 1937 when their state program was launched after legislation was passed requiring the teaching of conservation in all schools. Likewise, Ohio and Illinois use permanent committees to guide their program. The Ohio committee is largely a committee of state agency representatives. Illinois once had teachers on the state committee, but a reorganization followed the employment of a state director and now the committee is a very small one composed of the heads of the cooperating agencies. It probably would not be proper to call either the Ohio or Illinois committees curriculum committees.

The following states have permanent state committees, councils or commissions: California, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin.

In most cases these are appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The California State Committee is composed primarily of staff members of the Department of Education with one representative each from three other state agencies. There are no teachers on it. The committee serves primarily as a coordinating committee and a planning committee and gives clearance and direction to the several resource agencies interested in helping. Materials sponsored by the committee are frequently published cooperatively with the other agencies.

In some states where the Department of Education has not shown any great interest in conservation, voluntary state committees have come into existence with representation from the resource agencies and the colleges, universities and professional conservation organizations.

This was the case in Minnesota where the Natural Resources Council was formed in 1956. This idea grew out of representation of some of these groups at meetings of the Mid-West Conservation Education Conference. Here a concerted attempt is being made to get as many groups involved as possible. Their efforts will complement or supplement those of the temporary committees established to prepare a specific publication.

Ten states with voluntary committees are: Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming.

The Indiana committee was established primarily to bring about the enactment of a requirement for certain teachers to take a conservation course as a part of certification.

The New Hampshire Natural Resources Council is composed of representatives of lay or private groups and although agency per-

sonnel attend, they cannot hold office or vote. The Department of Education cooperates with the Council and encourages their interest and activities.

The Iowa and the Vermont committees studied their needs and recommended the establishment of permanent committees to replace theirs but so far unsuccessfully.

Such voluntary committees as these usually have to rely upon their organizations or agencies to assign or elect the representatives.

3. Another kind of function which cannot be performed too readily by the committees described so far, is that of serving as a coordinating group for all of the agencies and organizations interested in helping on conservation education matters.

Although the Michigan, California, Wisconsin, Ohio and Illinois committees make some effort of coordinating the state program, there is considerable difficulty because many of the groups are not represented on the committee. Likewise, these committees originate in the Departments of Education and to be in a better position to coordinate, their authority and responsibility really needs to come from the Governor or Legislature.

This was done in Wisconsin where a special coordinating job was needed to produce a resources guide for the state in which all agencies would assist. Thus the Legislature authorized a special committee for the purpose, composed of heads of state agencies, with the Governor as Honorary Chairman. The Vice-President of the University was chairman of the Education Sub-Committee. The Guide to Resources of Wisconsin was prepared and the committee will no doubt be dissolved.

In North Carolina a Resource-Use Education Commission was formed in 1946 with commission members receiving their appointments from the Governor. The Commission elected its own chairman and Executive Committee. The heads of state agencies were placed on the Commission because of their position. Institutional candidates were appointed by the presidents. Professional organizations elected or appointed their candidates. These were recommended to the Governor for appointment.

The Commission had 52 members and as Director of Resource-Use Education for the Department of Public Instruction, I served as the Commission Program Director and Secretary from 1947 to 1952.

We used sub-committees to activate projects in school camping, adult education, audio-visual and printed materials.

While having no administrative control of agencies to enforce coordination, much voluntary cooperation and coordination resulted because the heads of the agencies were members of the Commission

and could help decide the nature and extent of coordination needed and wanted.

The annual meetings of the Commission and the summer conferences sponsored, as well as the institutional committees organized to develop plans for their regions all served to bring the agencies, organizations and institutions together in a very worthwhile and healthy sort of way.

Unfortunately when I left and the State Superintendent who helped to organize it died, the Commission in North Carolina was abandoned.

The following states currently have Governor-appointed committees: Colorado, Florida, Maine and Oregon.

The committee in Colorado was established to design a state program and authorize the employment of a State Supervisor or Director. This was done and the Committee may be inactive now.

Florida's committee has functioned effectively since the mid-forties and has been able to continue despite the absence of a person at the state level to give a significant amount of time to the administrative details. A member of a university staff has had to assume these responsibilities.

4. Some states have not been able to have a state committee, council or commission established yet. It would be helpful if some foundation would make it possible for the states who have had successful experiences with committees to share their successes and experiences with those who would like to organize a state program with the help of a state committee, commission or council.

In summary, the special things which such committees can do effectively are:

- a. Prepare and plan for distribution of printed and audio-visual materials on:
 - i) the resources of the state
 - ii) effective methods of teaching conservation
 - iii) leadership techniques
 - iv) bibliographies and lists of materials and resources personnel.
- b. Activate resource agencies to assist in conservation education and help to channel their efforts into the most effective types of service.
- c. Assist institutions in their efforts to provide pre-service and in-service training in conservation.
- d. Sponsor state and regional conferences, summer institutes and workshops, and local meetings of teachers to increase interest and emphasis on conservation.
- e. Help the Department of Education to evaluate the present status of conservation in the state, the current progress and the future needs.

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