

Ferdie J. Deering

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# Soil Erosion Prevention IS Essential

**T**HE WORLD is washing away. Robert Toole, assistant director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, told a group of conservation leaders the other day that 23 billion tons of the world's soil is being lost to erosion each year. Permanently lost.

Toole said this is equivalent to the production of 23 million acres of soil. That is almost 36,000 square miles, half the size of Oklahoma, or as big as the state of Indiana.

The United States has never lost territory to military invaders but we are losing an estimated 3.4 billion tons annually by soil erosion. Toole said that at this rate the United States would be eroded out of business in 123 years.

Because of soil and water conservation programs in place, Oklahoma

could hold out 361 years before erosion would gobble us up, but we still are losing 113 million tons of soil a year. Erosion tends to accelerate bad effects of drought.

The occasion of this speculation was a meeting called by Gene Sawyer of Carnegie, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, to discuss the prospect of having conservation funds reduced by two-thirds.

It was pointed out that such drastic reduction would virtually eliminate technical assistance now provided by the Soil Conservation Service, would eliminate flood control programs, and cut out cost-sharing assistance to help land owners install conservation structures and practices.

Surveys have shown that the majority of citizens, including farmers,

strongly favor reduced spending by Congress and a balanced budget for government.

Evidence also strongly indicates that those surveyed were not anticipating major cuts in programs benefiting them, and a scramble is on in Washington to fund essential functions.

The question is: "What programs are essential?" Some government programs may be indispensable; others might not be. In evaluating them, the essentiality of soil and water as vital public resources ought to be considered.

To see what could happen here we need only to look to Africa or Asia.

A lot of Oklahoma soil already is at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico and we can't bring it back. Prevention is the best cure for erosion. Erosion prevention is essential.