

CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

John A. Hassell

Executive Director, Conservation Technology Information Center

Executive Director of the Conservation Technology Information Center since 1999, Mr. Hassell has been working in the field of water quality and conservation for over twenty years. Mr. Hassell is responsible for CTIC's overall operations including the budget, programs and marketing. Prior to joining CTIC, Mr. Hassell was Director of Water Quality Programs for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

where he oversaw Oklahoma's nonpoint source water quality program including six Clean Water Act grants, the state's nonpoint source monitoring program and public information and education programs. Mr. Hassell has extensive experience with conferences and workshops. While with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Mr. Hassell put on an Off-site Assessment Workshop, Stream Bank Stabilization Workshop, National Nonpoint Source Monitoring and Evaluation Conference, Pre-Conference Water Quality Workshops,

the First Annual Nonpoint Source Conference, and An Applied Fluvial Geomorphology Short Course. At CTIC, Mr. Hassell makes numerous presentations each year. Events have included national watershed, nonpoint source and wetland conferences. Mr. Hassell also assists CTIC staff in organizing and conducting the Annual Nonpoint Source Monitoring and Modeling Conference, as well as several other events each year.



WHERE HAS ALL THE PASSION GONE?

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Changes to conservation and environmental policy within the United States have been driven by crisis. An early example occurred during the 1930s with the onset of the Dust Bowl. This, a major environmental crisis to affect the livelihood of so many, led to the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service) and conservation districts. Then, during the late '60s and early '70s, when headlines broadcast massive fish kills and rivers catching on fire, the environmental movement was driven by considerable water pollution issues. Changes quickly followed with the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the passage of the Clean Water Act of 1972. Later, many other laws were passed to address safe drinking water, hazardous materials and other environmental issues. History proves that change occurs when passionate citizens of our country demand action to address environmental crises.

Where is our passion today? The majority of Americans are not aware of the current crisis in conservation and environmental stability. Increasing populations demand safe, inexpensive food, fiber and energy. Decreasing cropland acreages are expected to produce greater yields to satisfy the consumptive nature of our population. Depleted water supplies are stretched thin to

satisfy agricultural production, industrial processing and municipal use. Soil quality is being compromised because of the way our lands are managed. Yes, a crisis exists, but are people aware?

The evidence is in the data. In 1982, 420.4 million cropland acres were planted. In 2004, 276.8 million acres were planted. Water quality issues associated with agriculture account for 40% of the reported problems according to EPA's Office of Water, Oceans and Wetlands. The problems identified include sediment, nutrients and bacteria. World population has grown from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6.4 billion today. The United States population growth has gone from 120 million in 1950 to 293 million today, with a growth rate of approximately 3.2 million per year. The United States is the fastest growing industrialized country in the world. Rivers that once drained into our oceans have ceased to reach them because of the tremendous water withdrawals by hungry cities, industry and agriculture. Since 1950, the Ogallala Aquifer, a huge fossil aquifer stretching from the panhandle of Texas to the Dakota's, has lost 30% of its available water, which is equivalent to 50% of the water in Lake Erie. Our conservation efforts continue to address managing for soil erosion, rather than managing for soil quality. Yet in the United States, we still have 103 million acres of land eroding excessively, yielding 1.9 billion tons of soil loss annually. Our soil quality efforts are minimal, with only 22.6% of cropland acreage in a no-till system and less than 10% of those acres are continuously no-till. There is a crisis and no passion on the landscape demanding a change to protect the consumptive life that we all enjoy.

The presentation will discuss changes that need to be made in order for agriculture to continue to provide the safe, inexpensive products produced that society demands. The presentation will address the role that conservationists need to have in future agricultural programs. One of the ways to accomplish change is to renew the passion to promote changes that have positive benefits for our natural resources. There needs to be a revival of a conservation ethic by all who work in the area of conservation. And we need to remember that, "Conservation is more than just a word – it's a way of life – and it's forever."