

Resource Conservation Speech 2016 Esther Swift

There's a little farm a few miles from a small town. Nestled between a long, tin shed and a tall, red barn is an old, yet sturdy farmhouse. This structure is now well over 100 years old. But, if a house could talk. The stories it would tell. It would tell about the scorching, summer suns that would chip and fade the paint. It would tell of the drenching, spring rainstorms that turned the driveway in front of the house into a swamp. It would tell of the days before rural water was available and how my grandparents would enforce every rule they knew about water conservation just to keep the cistern full. Through the years, this house nurtured life, it saw windfalls and shortfalls, and yet it remained sturdy for generations. Today, this world is our home. In fact, the very root "eco" of ecology means "home." And, if we wish to preserve this home for our future generations—similar to the way that farmhouse was preserved for my family—we must realize how and why to manage water for conservation.

As we know, today we live, breathe, and survive based on our consumption of water. However, only 3% of the water on this planet is fresh, 2/3 of it is locked away in ice caps and glaciers, and 1/5 is inaccessible. This means that the .8% of water that is available for human consumption demands to be managed carefully so that we can provide habitats for animals, reducing flooding, and to ensure this life-giving source for our upcoming generations.

So let's start by managing water to provide for conservation for South Dakota's livestock and wildlife. In the Badlands alone, there are the species of 39 mammals, 9 reptiles, 6 amphibians, 206 birds, and 69 butterflies. On ranches across South Dakota, there are reported to be around 5 million head of cattle. South Dakota has also been named the #1 state for pheasant hunting along with being the home of many other types of game. Water allows South Dakota to be the haven of so many types of animals by not only providing them enough to drink but also be providing marshlands for local and migratory birds and the river homes of many types of water-dwelling creatures. However, it is our responsibility to manage water so that they habitats can remain functional and to dam water so that run-off does not smother wildlife in excessive sediment.

But dams are also import for reducing water which is another reason why we should manage water for conservation. The Fort Randall Dam in Pickstown is a familiar location to all of us. This dam was originally established during the Flood Control Act in 1944 as a means to help reduce flooding along the Missouri River. The truth is, water levels are not always consistent. While we endure many months of drought, we also experience many seasons of abundant rainfall. Because of this, conservationists determined to establish dams that would help manage water both in times of shortage and surplus and this should be the greatest motivation for us to continue developing and implementing methods of managing water to pass on to our future generations.

And let's also manage water for conservation to do just that: to provide this life-giving source to the upcoming generations. According to a 2014 Huffinton Post article, today farmers are already producing enough food to provide for 10 billion people—the same amount of people that are estimated to be populating the world by the year 2050. However, despite this encouraging discovery, the simple truth is that this can not be accomplished without enough water, and that is not a responsibility dependent upon our heirs but upon us. As the caretakers of this beautiful planet, it is in our job description to present the upcoming generations with a world just as healthy as the one we know. Today we are the innovators, the builders, the spenders, the seekers, the savers, and today this responsibility is in our sometimes small but always capable hands. What are we going to do? What are we going to leave to the life, beauty, and prosperity of the ones coming after us? And, in the meantime, what are we going to teach them? Will we tell them about the Clean Water Act established in 1972 to help keep water fresh? Will we teach them in Ag Ed about the importance of reduce groundwater pollution? Will be teach them through our actions to conserve water even through simple household tasks? Maybe our example can change the way we manage water forever.

So I hope that we leave for our future generations—for the future inhabitants of our home—a world just as beautiful as the one we know. I hope this house can someday speak of the things we did right and our dedication to preserving our natural resources. I hope that we clear evidence that we did everything in our power to manage water for conservation and to build an even brighter future.