

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Podcast

Episode 36: Dust Control

And welcome to the 36th Episode of the VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller, and thank you SO much for joining.

Well, it's the 13th hour. The exam window starts on Monday. Hopefully you're all rested up. Just as a few last minute tips, go ahead and revisit episodes 3 and 4. I know, that's a while ago.

As a refresher, I talked with Shane and Alex at Planning Certification about the exam and some tips, and some of those tips have to do with test day preparations. Like first and foremost, for pete's sake, get a good night's sleep.

Two, eat a breakfast. You don't want your brain power taken up by hunger pangs.

Three, don't make plans for after the exam. It just adds to anxiety on time management and trying to hurry, and my own personal piece of advice.

Don't study that morning or for a couple hours before you go to bed. Just relax your mind. Odds are there's nothing you're going to read during that time that's going to make or break your score, but you could overwhelm yourself. So, just take the time to breathe.

And with that, lets jump into this episode.

This week, we're elaborating on the Tennessee Valley Authority that got brought up in the last episode. Then we'll rewind a bit for the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, and a couple Conservation Acts: the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 and the Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act, also in 1935.

Starting with the Tennessee Valley Authority though, let's head on down to Alabama. Yep, Alabama.

(02:02)

So, the Tennessee Valley Authority starts in Alabama and NOT Tennessee? Well, that's just confusing. But, that's because the Tennessee Valley Authority has to do with the valley around the Tennessee River, which of course goes through Tennessee, but the river and some of its branches also goes through Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia.

The real story of the TVA though - that's the Tennessee Valley Authority, not the Time Variance Authority, you Marvel nerds - begins way back in 1916. You see, while the formation of the Tennessee Valley Authority was FDR's thing, the idea started in 1916 under Woodrow Wilson.

In 1916, we were on the cusp of WWI. I mean technically we were in it by then, but just by contributing supplies, and it was this contribution of supplies that led to Woodrow Wilson authorizing the construction of a hydroelectric dam in Muscle Shoals, Alabama in order to power a munitions plant.

It didn't end up being finished then though. The war ended before the dam was ever completed, and in the roaring 20's, construction just sort of flopped around while the government tried to figure out what to do with it. Finally, it was completed in 1925, and a debate ensued about whether to sell it or not.

If you remember, the stock market sort of crashed in 1929 and that sort of changed a lot. People ended up becoming real suspicious of private utilities, so selling it off to the private sector was definitely a no-go.

So in 1931, Senator George Norris from Nebraska said, "Hey! We have this dam thing started. Let's sell some cheap electricity to the people," and presented the Muscle Shoals Bill. President Hoover, though (remember this is before FDR) said, "Nah, utilities are the job of the private sector" and vetoed the bill.

Of course, Hoover, to put it bluntly, sucked ass at getting us out of the depression. So, when FDR took over, he jumped on it and passed the Tennessee Valley Authority Act in May of 1933.

(04:49)

You might have guessed, but the Tennessee Valley Authority Act created the Tennessee Valley Authority. But, what was the Tennessee Valley Authority anyways? What was it formed to do? What was its purpose?

Well, the Tennessee Valley Authority Act was directed to do a myriad of things: improve the navigability of the Tennessee River, provide flood control (through reforestation), develop agriculture, commerce and industry in the valley, and operate the hydroelectric dam lovingly known as the Wilson Dam to provide electricity to the public.

The TVA covers every state that the Tennessee River and major branches go through. To recap, that's Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee of course. The TVA wasn't without its opponents though.

Of course, private utilities tried suing the government, saying it was unconstitutional for the government to be involved in utilities. Because you know, they called it socialism and all. So, that lame argument has apparently been around forever I guess. Unoriginal.

Despite all that, the TVA endured, and by 1934 it employed over 9,000 people, and by 1944, built 16 hydroelectric dams.

Ultimately, it became the largest public utility in the U.S. with 30 dams, 14 solar energy sites, only 1 little wind farm, 16 natural gas plants, 8 coal plants, and 3 nuclear plants.

Anyways, you can see why it ended up being one of the reasons that the National Planning Resources Board – or National Resources Committee – put together the Regional Factors report.

(06:47)

If you remember from a couple episodes ago, we talked about how the droughts in the early 30's helped contribute to the Great Depression. We also talked about how FDR signed the Agricultural Adjustment Act to try and help the farming community get right.

That wasn't all though, The Taylor Grazing Act was introduced by, well, a House Representative from Colorado named Edward Taylor (yeah, it's always their name) to regulate some of the grazing lands in the west. But how did it even come about?

Well, in 1928 a guy named Hugh Bennett wrote an article called, "Soil Erosion: A National Menace." Pretty strong words. Anyways, this report - among other things - talked about how livestock, grazing, trampling of vegetation, all helped exacerbate soil erosion by removing the anchors that kept the top layers down. Once it's dry, up in the air it goes, and it was definitely dry.

Since huge portions of these lands were unregulated, grazing was out of control because Hoover didn't do anything apparently. That's where the Taylor Grazing Act comes in, and in 1934, FDR signed it into law. And what did the Taylor Grazing Act do?

Well, the Taylor Grazing Act basically created grazing districts and ended open grazing. In other words, instead of ranchers being able to just use federal lands for grazing completely unregulated, they had to

get permits and approval for entry, and obey the grazing practices that were put in place by the newly created Department of Grazing.

It wasn't for no reason though, we needed some kind of intervention because the open grazing was abused to the point where the dust bowl was continually worsening. We needed to regulate grazing to keep roots in the ground to anchor the soils.

Side nugget, the Department of Grazing was eventually folded in with the General Land Office to become what we know today as, the Bureau of Land Management.

(08:56)

So, if the whole 1934 Taylor Grazing Act was basically put into place to control soil erosion on grazing lands, what about the farm lands?

The agricultural Adjustment Act helped a little by reducing over-farming, but controlling vegetation for soil erosion purposes wasn't really part of the deal there, and the droughts were continuing. So, in 1935 FDR signed the Soil Conservation Act, and what did this act do?

If you took the huge leap and said created the Soil Conservation Service? Or probably some variation of that, you'd be correct.

The Act emphasized the need to protect soils to "preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of reservoirs, and maintain the navigability of rivers and harbors, protect public health, public lands, and relieve unemployment." Pretty tall order.

So? How'd they do that exactly? Demonstration Projects!

Demonstration projects were basically cooperative agreements they made these with land owners to try out some soil conservation measures. Some of these included planting ground cover to protect soils, rotate crop plantings to let portions of the land remain unused, using terraces and contours to retain moisture, and to just leave land that was highly susceptible to erosion alone.

This was all voluntary of course. Farmers would agree to a 5-year commitment with the Soil Conservation Service, and contribute their labor. In return, the Soil Conservation Service would supply the materials, plans, and additional labor from the Civilian Conservation Service we talked about a few episodes ago, of course. It all works together.

(11:00)

Well, that rounds out today I think. I was going to try and get to the Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act, but a story about that Act kind of needs some details on the Antiquities Act of 1906 (which we didn't cover), and probably some other historic preservation background information. And well, there just ain't time for that.

So, guess what, next episode will be all about historic preservation.

To recap this episode though, we began with the Tennessee Valley Authority. The multi-state river-basin planning authority, and how its creation contributed to the Regional Factors in National Planning and Development report that was put out by the National Resources Committee.

Then, we pivoted over to the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934, and its contribution to prevent the worsening dust bowl situation by regulating grazing lands.

And then we talked about the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 which also contributed to helping solve the dust bowl situation. It accomplished that by assisting farmers with soil conservation techniques like rotating crops, using contours to retain moisture, avoiding susceptible soils, and planting ground cover vegetation where needed.

(12:29)

Well, thanks again for joining me! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at theyveryunofficialaicpguide@gmail.com, and I'll do my best to help out if I can.

This week, we talked about some solutions to the dust bowl and explained how the Tennessee Valley Authority fit into the whole regional planning thing under the National Resources Committee's report: Regional Factors in National Planning and Development.

For those who tuned in last episode, our question was, "Who were the three original members of the National Planning Board, and what was the name of the organization that published Regional Factors in National Planning and Development?"

The answer there is Frederic Delano, Charles Merriam, and Wesley Mitchell, and the organization, if you hadn't guessed it yet since I said it about 5 seconds ago, was the National Resources Committee; the new name of the National Resources Planning Board.

If you want to play along this episode, the question is, "What was the Bill that was ultimately vetoed by President Hoover and acted as the basis for the Tennessee Valley Act? And why did President Hoover veto it?"

As always, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast on whatever platform you use for podcasts and feel free to sign up on the show's website so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement all of your other study regimens, and share this out with any planners you know, and don't forget to leave a review either.

Tune in again next episode. Like I mentioned, we're going to preserve some history with the Antiquities Act of 1906, the creation of the first historic preservation commission, and then the Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act of 1935. Thanks again everyone.

'Till next time.

Links:

The Tennessee Valley Authority:

<https://www.tva.com/About-TVA/Our-History>

<https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/history-of-the-tva>

The Taylor Grazing Act:

Taylor Grazing Act | Legislation | US Encyclopedia of law (lawi.us)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taylor_Grazing_Act_of_1934

The Soil Conservation Act:

<https://livingnewdeal.org/glossary/soil-conservation-act-1935/>

Honoring 86 Years of NRCS – A Brief History | NRCS (usda.gov)