

RURAL LANDSCAPES (1985, R1990, R2001, R2007)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects urges that the unique qualities of rural landscapes and communities be protected, even as competing needs of a growing population and vibrant economies are met. The rural landscape, whether forest, field, farm, or village contains vital ecological, economic and cultural qualities that are a finite and dwindling resource. Their protection, conservation, and preservation are important to the well being of the nation. Saving these assets for the benefit of future generations can only be achieved through the application of the sound principles, policies and practices including wise land use planning, design and management.

Rationale

The term "rural landscape" describes the diverse portion of the nation's land area not densely populated or intensively developed, and not set aside for preservation in a natural state. The rural landscape includes a variety of geological and geographic features such as cropland, forests, deserts, swamps, grasslands, pastures, rivers and lakes.

The rural landscape provides natural resources, food and fiber, wildlife habitat and inspiration. It supports the diversity of organisms that make human life possible in the nation's complex ecology. The rural landscape needs to continue to accommodate human uses, which are a significant contributor to global socio-economic systems. However, the rural landscape is also the domain of other forms of life, and human uses also need to accommodate biodiversity.

As population expands, greater pressures are placed on the rural landscape to meet a variety of demands. Uses imposed upon the natural landscape without consideration of aesthetic values, natural processes and historic heritage can pose severe and irreversible harm. Sprawl, resource exploitation, unwise agricultural practices, infrastructure, and industrial land uses may contribute to the degradation or loss of the special qualities of the rural landscape.

Wise stewardship and land use planning of both urban and rural areas can reduce the pressures on the rural landscape, preserving its essential characteristics and supporting its diverse natural and managed functions.