

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

When the Environmental Advisory Board was first organized in 1970, there was a great sense of anticipation among both its members and supporters. Charles Stoddard hoped that its creation signaled the dawn of a new era.¹ Barney Dodge, Director of the Institute for Water Resources, and his young assistant for environmental affairs, David Aggerholm, dreamed of the EAB assuming a position roughly similar to that of the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors.² Of course, all three men were disappointed. Ten years later, Stoddard bitterly noted, "I don't think that you can make a sorority house out of a whorehouse."³

Some of the obstacles which prevented the Board from meeting the goals of the more radical environmentalists were insurmountable. First of all, statutory restrictions prevented the Board from having too much freedom or even meeting without having a Corps representative present. The Corps' decentralized organization, too, proved frustrating to members; it took a while before they took their charge as advisers to the Chief of Engineers as literally as it was intended. Then again, the Corps, without any clear guidance on how to implement its responsibilities under NEPA, found itself confronting a maze of problems, some of which were foreseeable, some of which were not. Wanting to move vigorously, but with some caution too, the Corps often appeared to several early EAB members as full of good intentions, but lacking sufficient courage to exercise its charge.

Caldwell, Clement, and probably other Board members felt that the Corps' environmental activism directly depended on the interest of Congress. Toward the middle of the 1970s, according to Clement, when a "backlash" was being felt on Capitol Hill, the Corps began to drag its feet. Even Clarke became less aggressive.⁴ EAB members naturally wanted the Corps to be an enthusiastic advocate of environmental planning, without being pulled along by political pressures; but, again in Clement's words, "the Corps' bread is buttered on the other side," meaning the side of Congress. "Jack Morris, for example," Clement explained, "wants to do what is right, but he can't butt Congress."⁵ Caldwell added, "The House Committee on Public Works is the problem."⁶

Today the Corps of Engineers is most definitely an advocate of environmental planning. No one would claim that this change of attitude is the handiwork of the EAB, but none would deny that the Board has made valuable suggestions on how to become better planners. The questions facing the Board today are not so much philosophical as technical, albeit philosophical matters inform engineering and scientific approaches. Board

members are generally solicited for advice in their fields of expertise; their objective appraisal does much to insure that the Corps treats issues with dispassion and balance. In giving its advice the Board is increasingly forced to address policies and regulations of other federal agencies. This is a significant difference between the present Board and earlier ones. When the EAB was first formed, some Corps personnel had the fanciful notion that the Engineers were destined to become *the* leaders in the environmental field. This delusion did not last long. New legislation, executive orders, and regulations have forced—with positive results—federal water resource agencies to work closely together. No one agency can consider itself the white knight of the environmental movement, although by statute the Environmental Protection Agency has final responsibility in many areas. Whatever the case, Corps policies cannot simply be constructed in a vacuum; and EAB members, recognizing this fact, more frequently listen to representatives from other federal agencies as well as from the Corps. In the future more of this contact will undoubtedly be necessary.

While the EAB has helped the Corps in its planning, it has never been able to do long-range planning of its own. Issues have usually been too pressing. Chiefs of Engineers, faced with important legal suits, precedent-making policy decisions, or congressional deadlines usually have wanted Board members to address items of immediate concern. Clearly, the Board needs time to view environmental issues broadly, without having to respond to specific problems. Nevertheless, the Board works more effectively today than it did in the past, mainly because it has better working procedures and because its perceptions of the Corps are more realistic. Members recognize the bureaucratic and statutory restraints on the Corps. They also realize that a federal advisory board works under strict limitations on its authority, something over which the Army has no control. Indeed, although a comparison between the EAB and other federal advisory boards is beyond the scope of this history, the EAB has probably had more freedom and made greater contributions than many.

Today the Board has become more and more technically oriented. Members do not represent any one organization or persuasion; they simply want to clean up the environment, and they recognize that engineering, properly applied, can be the environment's restorer as well as despoiler. For its part, the Corps makes an ongoing, conscious effort to be sensitive to environmental concerns—successfully too, according to McLindon.⁷ Even Houck, who has had some acerbic conflicts with the Corps over the years, admits that the Engineers are "light years ahead" of where they were only a decade ago.⁸

General Morris wanted results from the Board, and he got them. The EAB went through ten years of growth, conflict, and introspection, often making insightful suggestions, but rarely fulfilling the promise of its birth. Today, however, the EAB shows the mature judgment and technical expertise which had always been expected but, unfortunately, only periodically



A nonstructural answer to flood control problems, Indian Bend Wash, Scottsdale, Arizona.

delivered. Some of the early challenges facing Board members, such as the proper preparation of environmental impact statements, have been resolved. Other problems, such as mitigation and land use planning, remain. However, with the Board and the Corps working in close harmony, there is little doubt the EAB will continue to influence environmental policy to the benefit of the Corps and the nation.