

FOREWORD

Sound land use planning requires consideration of (i) the extent to which the use will be limited by the natural features of the land and (ii) the effect the use will have on the ability of the land to continue to support that use. It is also desirable to know of the need for special structural design or land management to overcome limitations, or to sustain the use.

Land capability assessment provides a valuable means of obtaining this information.

The Soil Conservation Authority is developing land capability rating systems for a wide range of land uses which will enable land to be rated on a five-class scale for each use, with Class 1 land having the highest capability and Class 5 land the lowest. The Authority's main concern is with those land-use effects which may damage the land and which may also affect water production, however the consequences to production or the success of the use are an integral part of land capability assessment and are also included in the rating systems.

Land capability assessments may be made to meet the requirements of different levels of planning. At the most detailed level, ratings are applied to areas of land which are uniform with respect to the most important land features for the uses of interest. These areas are referred to as land capability map units and are mappable on large scale maps. They will usually correspond to the land components of the general purpose land system surveys but may need to be defined on a broader or narrower basis to meet the needs of specific uses. Broader scale mapping units, such as land systems, which contain consistent combinations of the more detailed map units, may be used for broader scale planning.

Before a land capability study is made, the level of detail needed to achieve the planning objectives must be known. The level of detail required for broad strategy planning, for example, differs markedly from that required for detailed urban or farm project planning.

In all assessments of land capability, even those which involve the most detailed mapping and data collection, conclusions are based on averages and other generalisations from data from a limited number of sites. The resultant ratings thus provide generalised information at levels of resolution directly proportional to the scale of mapping and data collection. They should not be used as a substitute for site surveys when specific on-site information is needed.

These assessments are concerned only with the physical features of the land and take no account, except in a very general way, of social and economic considerations, which are necessarily involved in the ultimate decisions.

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