CONSERVATION OF MINERALS

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As an abstraction the idea of conservation of natural resources is widely accepted by the public. In fact, active opposition to the idea is almost nonexistent. It is a safe and attractive phrase for politicians, philosophers and party platforms, as well as a plausible caption for many laws. Yet for most people conservation remains a vague profession of faith, not tied down to realities of practical programs. To specialists in forests, parks, game, recreation, soils, water resources and minerals, conservation means many different things. In a recent survey at the University of Wisconsin it was found that conservation was receiving attention in twenty-seven different courses, in nearly as many departments, and that in no two of them was the subject defined in the same terms. The many so-called conservation laws in our state and federal statutes reflect an equally chaotic condition. Text-book definitions of conservation, in the very nature of the case, must be so generalized that they fail to convey any clear notion of the practical problems involved. To illustrate the difficulty of simplifying the concept of conservation I quote to you an attempt made by the twenty-seven units of the University of Wisconsin to agree on a general platform:

Conservation is the effort to insure to society the maximum present and future benefit from the use of natural resources. It involves the inventory and evaluation of natural resources; calls for the maintenance of the renewable resources at a level commensurate with the needs of...