

SOUTHERN SEEDING SERVICE: 35 YEARS IN EROSION CONTROL

Southern Seeding Service, under the supervision of Ralph D. Stout, Jr. performs erosion control for highways, industrial sites, utility rights-of-way, airports, golf courses, and water and sewage treatment plants in central and eastern North Carolina. "Anywhere the ground has been disturbed presents an opportunity for our services," says Stout.

The business began in 1942, as Southern Mapping and Engineering Company (Southern Seeding Service succeeded this company) based on a need at that time for erosion control on a number of military installations being constructed over the eastern United States. The men who founded the company were agronomists, farmers and engineers with years of experience in the growing of grass and erosion control. Ralph D. Stout, Sr. headed the company at that time. Along with six employees, using antiquated farm equipment, they seeded and grassed airports, army bases, highways and athletic fields. Most of the work was done by hand.

Southern Seeding Service operates office and warehouse facilities in both Greensboro and Raleigh, North Carolina. Most employees are full time with a year round minimum of twenty on the payroll. Southern Seeding Service currently has five superintendents and twenty operators and laborers using the most modern equipment available.

Southern Seeding's management (l to r): General Superintendent Vance Kirkman, Resident Engineer Bob Harding, and President Ralph Stout Jr.



"At the present time, the company owns two hydroseeders, a Toro unit and a Finn unit, four Finn mulch spreaders, three asphalt distributors, eleven tractors and twenty-three trucks. The trucks range in size from pick-ups to 10-wheel truck-tractors. Additionally, Southern Seeding Service operates twelve truck trailers along with tag-along trailers, and all the required miscellaneous equipment such as tillers, rollers, spreaders, seeders and harrows needed to operate a business like ours.

"We're basically satisfied with this equipment. We use primarily Ford Industrial tractors, Chevrolet trucks, along with several GMC's. We do have another company Classic Landscapes, Ltd. in Raleigh, which is in the commercial maintenance business, and in my opinion, the equipment they are trying to operate the business with is just not properly designed nor constructed to withstand the rigors of commercial maintenance work," says Stout.

Last year, Southern Seeding Service spent over \$140,000 on equipment maintenance. Certain types of maintenance — painting, minor tune-ups and repairs — are done in-house during the winter. Major engine overhaul, transmission replacement, etc., is normally performed by local dealers.

The company owns all its equipment and purchases \$50,000 to \$75,000 worth a year.

The size of an erosion control project will vary considerably, says

Stout. "Some will go as low as \$700, some as high as \$300,000. We're primarily involved only in establishing the initial vegetation. However, the contracts with the Department of Transportation, here in North Carolina do include maintenance until the job is accepted. "We do some consultant work primarily for industrial sites where we prepare specifications and submit our proposals on same.

"At the present time, we are in the final stages of completing erosion control work on approximately thirty miles of highway between Kinston, NC and New Bern, NC. We had a total of five contracts in this area, two of which have been completed and accepted. Of the three remaining, Robert Merritt is resident engineer on two of the projects and Bob Harding is resident engineer on the third.

"These three project have represented a particular challenge to our people in that when they were bid, they were scheduled for completion in August 1978, November 1978 and December 1978; however, due to the need to get coastal summer traffic on the new road, we have had to re-schedule our men and equipment to complete our portion of the work by the middle of June. When these projects are completed, it will put the traveling public on a four-lane interstate type highway instead of an antiquated two lane road. We are proud of our performance on these projects.

"We spend over two hundred thousand dollars per year on lime, fertilizer, grass seed and the various mulches we use. We use wood cellulose fiber and straw for mulching. The basic agent we use for holding straw is emulsified asphalt. The price is competitive and it's readily available, plus it does a good job for us. I would like to see a material available that would be priced equal and do as good a job but wouldn't be as dirty and hard to handle. We also use a considerable amount of excelsior matting and "Landglas", fiberglas roving.

"Due to the climate in North Carolina most of our jobs here are seeded and there is not much sodding done. We can usually seed, except in the dead of winter, and get

Southern Seeding Service

reasonable germination. Along the coast, there is some bermudagrass sprigging and beachgrass planting. We've got a job down there, just ready to start, on dune sand that's primarily going to be a sprigging and mulching job.

"We don't see much work coming our way as a result of the Surface Mining Act, mainly because there is not that much mining in the area where we work. We have done some erosion control work for rock quarries; they usually have to take off some overburden, build up a big berm and need to get some erosion control on those areas. We did one job in the mountains for a mica company. They'd had a problem for years, so when we went up and did the work, the newspaper took pictures and wrote it up. We just did our job and Mother Nature took over and made it look good. Sometimes she makes us look bad though.

"The Trade Association that has done the most for us is the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. That's the association for

businesses like ours. We also belong to the North Carolina Landscape Contractors Association which really got started as a result of ALCA involvement. Additionally we're national associate members of the Associated General Contractors of America and associate members of the Carolinas Branch of AGC. As far as industry educational programs go, we feel that we find what we need in ALCA's annual meeting and the programs and seminars they sponsor around the country.

"On the one hand, we see business opportunities for us in the next couple of years, however, the Minority Business Enterprise requirements being pushed by the federal government could adversely affect small businesses like ours. Since the majority of our work is subcontract involving federal money participation, general contractors may find themselves in the position of being unable to subcontract erosion control work to us due to having to conform to the quotas being established by the federal government.

One of the greatest things about our country is that people have the opportunity to do the thing they think they can be most successful in but by the same token, I dislike the prospect that the federal government may legislate us out of business by discriminating against us. We have even considered setting up a minority owned business enterprise which would in actuality only be a sham. We are not willing to play that sort of game so, if Southern Seeding Service gets legislated out of business, Uncle Sam is just going to miss a good tax payer.

"The greatest asset of our company is our people. A few years ago, we brought in some younger people who, while they weren't really professionally trained, had the proper attitudes to come in and learn the business. They're our key people in the field right now. Our philosophy is, "You can have all the equipment in the world and you can have all the money to finance it with, but if you haven't got the folks doing the job, forget it, you've got nothing."

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