

**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery  
For the Honorable Lynn Scarlett,  
Deputy Secretary of the Interior,  
Dallas Garden Club Presentation**

*November 2005*

I am delighted to join you. Four years ago, I left my home in Santa Barbara, California to come to the world of Washington, D.C.

Each day dawns with new experiences. Some are funny, as when, during my FBI background check, my neighbor mistook the FBI agent for a termite exterminator. There is the delightful; for example, seeing up close a wee baby panda—a 12-pound ball of fluff at the National Zoo. There is the unexpected, such as plucking scales from salmon in a remote part of the Yukon River in Alaska at a Fish and Wildlife Service research camp, or the exhilarating—dog sledding in Denali National Park at the foot of Mt. McKinley on a sparkling February day.

There is, too, the surreal—sitting in the Oval Office at a meeting with the President or introducing the First Lady at an event in Kentucky. And I have experienced the deeply serious: watching the Pentagon before my eyes burst into flames on September 11, 2001. More recently, there is the poignant—seeing the devastation of Hurricane Katrina across 90,000 square miles, an area the size of Great Britain.

Above all, there is the gratifying—making a difference on the ground for America. These efforts include unglamorous acts of management, such as completing under the President's Management Agenda an annual financial audit within 45 days of the fiscal year close contrasted to a five-month closing period when we arrived four years ago.

We are also making a difference on the ground through policy. We have, for example, reduced risks to communities from catastrophic wild land fires and restoring forest health on over 15 million acres through the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. We've conserved 1.7 million acres of wetlands and uplands in three years through two cooperative conservation programs by working with private landowners.

Let us step back for a moment and consider a few vital statistics of the Department of the Interior as a context for discussion.

Interior is not, as one pop celebrity asked the Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, the interior decorating division of the White House. Instead, the Department of the Interior manages one in every five acres of the United States.

We operate over 800 dams and irrigation facilities that provide irrigation to farmers who produce 60 percent of the Nation's produce, and these dams provide drinking water to 31 million people. We conserve unique natural, cultural and historic resources that comprise the identity of our great Nation—the Statue of Liberty, Liberty Bell, Yellowstone National Park, Frederick Douglas's home, Mesa Verde; the list goes on.

We manage lands and offshore waters that generate a third of the Nation's domestic energy supply. We work with tribes in managing trust lands and educating Indian children. Through the U.S. Geological Survey, we map the Nation and provide earth sciences to predict and manage natural hazards.

I am awed at the challenges and responsibilities of the Department of the Interior. Our mission lies at the confluence of people, land and water.

How well we do our jobs and fulfill our mission affects the lives of each and every American—a sobering thought. We pursue our mission with many tools and resources. We manage over 57,000 facilities of every imaginable type, including dams, hotels, campgrounds, wastewater treatment plants, schools, labs, and historic structures. We have a budget close to \$11 billion and 70,000 employees who work at 2,400 locations.

Our daily headlines include endangered species, droughts, fires, and energy supplies. Search and rescue, hunting and fishing, park visitation, avian flu, and Native American children all comprise our daily fare and the substance of our news headlines.

We face difficult decisions amid an array of complexities.

- How do we blend recreation opportunities with resource protection?
- How do we provide resource access to minerals and energy, and maintain a light environmental footprint?

- How can we provide water supply for silvery minnows, farmers, and towns all at once and in a context of scarcity?
- How do we provide hazards information in the face of Nature's uncertainties?

As land managers, the central theme of our vision as we fulfill our responsibilities is what we call cooperative conservation—conservation that springs from partnered problem solving. Cooperative conservation rests on a foundation of what author William Rosenzweig calls “reconciliation ecology.” It centers on innovation, inspiration, and local insights to achieve environmental results.

I'd like to share with you today a compass that has helped me play my part in leading the Department. It is a compass that transcends the world of Washington. It transcends public and private spheres of action. It gives me a framework for thinking about the policy and management characteristics of successful action. Join me for a few moments to circumnavigate the points on this compass.

The first point on the compass is the old adage: “no man is an island” (and no woman either). All of us achieve goals better by working with others. Consider Interior's conservation mission. We manage one in five acres of the United States, but private stewardship is central to conservation success.

In Maine, along the Duck Trap River, for example, we have a mosaic of land ownerships along this river that is one of eight remaining places that still host the Atlantic salmon. Some 28 partnering organizations are restoring parts of the river habitat, turning abandoned gravel pits into vernal pools, replanting native grasses along the stream banks, working with snowmobile enthusiasts to create trails away from sensitive habitat, and placing conservation easements on some lands for enduring protection.

In August 2005, the White House sponsored a conference on cooperative conservation as a follow up to the President's Executive Order on Cooperative Conservation. The conference showcased dozens of stories of cooperative conservation across the Nation, large and small.

There is much cause for optimism in these tales of cooperative conservation across America.

Here in Texas along the Galveston coast, we see cooperative efforts to achieve sea marsh restoration. Or we see many ranchers in Texas participating through our Private Stewardship grants to protect golden-cheeked warblers.

The Duck Trap River tale and other ventures in cooperative conservation illuminate the second point on my compass—the importance of what Nobel laureate economist F. A. Hayek calls experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge encompasses the knowledge of time, place, and circumstance, whether on the ground, in a factory, or within a community.

Poet Wallace Stevens captures this notion when he writes: “Perhaps real truth depends upon a walk around the lake.” His poetry offers both a literal and metaphoric insight. Consider Alaska fishermen and albatross. Our Fish and Wildlife Service determined that fishing practices had adverse effects on albatross. When the Service brought this to the attention of the fishermen, they used their experiential knowledge to come up with alternative fishing practices that did not harm the albatross. What was the result? Continued fishing alongside protected albatross.

We all know the relevance of science in informing decisions. Sometimes we forget the importance of experiential knowledge, which helps us define the doable and pinpoint the possible.

The next point on the compass is the omnipresence of complexity so that, often, there are, as economist Thomas Sowell has quipped, there are “no solutions, only trade offs.”

Consider Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane wrought devastation over 90,000 square miles, an area the size of Great Britain. Twenty-five percent of timber in the area was downed by the storm—some 19 billion board feet, or enough to build 800,000 homes. Over 600,000 people were rendered homeless, and millions of people went without power or water, some for weeks. All offshore oil and most natural gas production was shut down during and immediately after the hurricane.

The hurricane unleashed many decision making complexities. There were the practical complexities that rendered search and rescue challenging. Emergency response was especially complex because of the extent and scope of devastation. For example, 911 calls reached emergency call centers from people stranded on rooftops. But the calls

showed links to street addresses—for streets that were all under water. Our folks from the US Geological Survey stepped in with global positioning information that could pinpoint the geographic location of the stranded people on rooftops. As a result, thousands of people were able to be evacuated using this overlay of 911 information with GPS information.

But I want, instead, to mention the complexities of thinking about the future and how to rebuild the devastated area? On one hand, local folks yearn to return to their homes, heritages, and communities. On the other hand, questions of future risk and public safety loom. Many areas face heightened risk of future flooding and damage from storm surges and hurricanes. An estimated 25 percent of coastal wetlands and barrier reefs were lost as a result of the recent hurricanes. Yet those wetlands and coastal barrier reefs provide buffers against storm damage on adjacent lands. With the loss of these natural systems, is rebuilding in some areas unwise?

This is the balancing act decision makers—federal, state, local and private—face. Should they invest in restoration, replacing one-for-one what was lost? Or should they construct communities that are adapted to changed circumstances and reduce future risks of harm? Who should decide?

There are no simple answers. President Bush committed to working with these coastal communities to enhance their long-term safety and well being—but the path forward is complex, dynamic, and uncertain.

This brings me to the next point on my compass. Let us turn back the pages of history to Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who wrote: “All is flux; nothing stays still.” His insight has multiple implications for me as a manager and policy maker. We can neither know nor prescribe the future—whether from the “butterfly effect” of chaos theory, or from the inevitable fickleness of human action.

The omnipresence of change makes nimbleness a virtue and underscores the imperative of “feedback loops” in organizational design and management. This is why we are emphasizing what is called adaptive management whereby we set on-the-ground performance goals, undertake actions to achieve those goals, monitor results, and adjust our actions, if necessary, to achieve the goals we set forth.

Consider, for example, our efforts with the Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership outside of Tucson in Arizona. There, through a collaborative process, our BLM, working with ranchers, conservation groups, recreation organizations, and others, developed shared goals for land health. They set up a governance process for implementing actions to achieve these goals, then monitor progress and adjust their management practices if they fall short of expected goals.

Or consider planning for avian flu and a possible pandemic. How do we plan for unknown or imprecise risks in a context of constantly changing circumstances? Dynamic circumstances often require strategies that include both anticipation—trying to predict and prevent a risk—and resilience in which we adapt and adjust if a risk becomes reality. In the case of avian flu, this suggests a policy approach that includes vaccines—a form of anticipation—and antiviral therapies, which provide resilience.

Let us step back from my compass for a moment and reflect on the broader context of policy and management. Both policy and management are fundamentally about people and ideas. Policy and management both require framing problems, identifying ways to address them, and figuring out how to motivate folks to join within that framework to act together to achieve results.

The tales I have recounted of the Duck Trap River and Alaska fishermen are emblematic of cooperative conservation—the interface of people and places; ideas and actions. Cooperative conservation, as a construct of policy and management, is built on a foundation of communication and dialogue to achieve conservation goals through partnerships.

Working as I do in the world of Washington, in the world of policy and politics, where habits of debate predominate, I am especially interested in the transcendence of debate. How do we achieve conversation with a center, not sides?

That interest brings me to the remaining points of my compass. First of these points is that civility is, perhaps, the greatest civic virtue. The good news is that civility is alive and well in dispersed local communities across America. A corollary to civility is the elemental importance of the ability to listen. Author Walter Isaacs, in his book *Dialogue*, observes that “to listen is to develop an inner silence.” This sort of dialogue

and intense listening is what I see unfolding through pioneers of cooperative conservation in the Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership and elsewhere.

I have now come full circle around my decision making compass to a point that is both the beginning and the end. Success in any large or small organization is about knowing where you are trying to go and measuring progress. Yet identifying appropriate goals and metrics is not easy.

For abandoned mine land clean up, for example, is our goal the number of streams and acres reclaimed? Or is the appropriate metric the extent of human and environmental risks reduced? If the latter is the more meaningful goal, how, precisely, might we measure risk reduction? These questions are important because they affect how we set priorities and spend dollars. I love these challenges, which are both conceptual and practical.

In conclusion, I want to end on a note of optimism. I am a perennial optimist, like a farmer I met whose wife calls him a “next year country man.” She calls him a “next year country man” because he is always saying, “Next year, there will be no snow in July; there will be no hale in August, and plenty of rain in the spring.” I am a “next country person,” too. In the context of Interior’s mission, cooperative conservation is efflorescing, bringing environmental partnerships, dialogue, and outcomes that simultaneously achieve healthy lands, thriving communities, and dynamic economies.