

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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REMARKS OF SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR ROGERS C. B. MORTON
BEFORE THE OUTDOOR WRITERS OF AMERICA
MAZATLAN, MEXICO, JUNE 26, 1972

I can't tell you what a pleasure it is for me to be here in Mazatlan for your convention, not merely because of the great respect I have for your distinguished organization, but to take this opportunity to commend each of you for the magnificent public service you perform in the accuracy, fairness, and eloquence of your coverage of our natural resources.

As Secretary of the Interior my major responsibility is to oversee the balance between the conservation of our natural resources and environmental heritage -- and the economic development of these finite resources to meet the continuing demands for social progress.

It is an awesome task of national proportion, requiring the interest and commitment of those not only in government, but the members of our media, of industry, and those in every American home.

I'm reminded of an editorial that appeared years ago in the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, a small Nevada paper edited by the late Lucius Beebe. The editorial addressed an item of great concern to the Board of Education -- the construction of a new school -- and a hardy, less than elitist group of townsfolk who were fighting for the preservation of a historical artifact -- as old as Virginia City itself. In this case a rather famous bordello.

I hasten to add that Mr. Beebe was of the view that the interests of the people would be met best by moving the school. As you'll undoubtedly notice, we've made little progress in the last twenty years.

As amusing as this case may be it rather poignantly illustrates a crisis we face not only in national attitudes, but in government. That is an understanding of the difficulty we face in matching our limited natural resources, land, water and air -- with the demands of the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak with you about our recent accomplishments in the environment, as well as the critical legislation creating a National Land Use Policy, and the actions we are taking now for the future of our fish and wildlife.

As President Nixon has said, "the time to start is now," and we have.

Outlays for major environment programs in Fiscal Year 1973 are expected to exceed 2.5 billion dollars more than three times the level spent in 1969.

We have initiated ambitious programs for the future of our recreation, land and energy resources -- setting aside wilderness areas; and banning the use of poisons in predator control on public lands. DDT and other harmful pesticides have been banned from public lands, and we are seeking to curtail their use nationally.

Under the Endangered Species Act we have taken strong measures to protect 8 species of great whales and 8 species of spotted cats. The President has further introduced new legislation giving us additional authority to protect imperiled species before they are actually threatened with extinction. This would allow for example greater protection to the polar bear.

More than 160 civil actions and 320 criminal actions to stop water pollution were filed against alleged polluters in 1971 alone, by invoking the Refuse Act of 1899.

All of these actions exemplify our commitment to act now to provide all Americans with clean air, clean water, and continuing access to the open spaces, timberland, deserts, meadows and estuaries that are at the center of our national heritage.

Let me hasten to add, that we cannot produce an instant environment with a new set of dimensions without a long time commitment.

What is still needed, however, is a provision to ensure that this momentum continues -- that the spirit and accomplishments of our efforts now are combined with our programs for the future.

In the next 30 years America will require twice the dwelling units, water and power systems, waste disposal facilities and recreation areas we have today.

By 1980 alone, our demand for camping and recreation sites will increase by nearly 70%: All of these dimensions of our future will affect land use.

Land is our basic resource. It supports all others. In the face of idealists who wish to halt all construction it is the key to preservation: To the developer it is an inextractable part of economic progress.

We discovered late the character of nature. Regardless of the ascendancy of human progress, our earth systems answer only to the impersonal laws of physics, chemistry, biology and natural law.

Coastal marshlands best illustrate the problem. An average acre of wetlands produces six times as much organic food as an acre of wheat field. Two thirds of our commercial fish and shellfish and most of our sport fish are dependent upon the wetlands ecosystems, to say nothing of our coastal and migratory birds.

In the twenty years between 1947 and 1967 alone, over 256,000 acres, or almost 70 percent of California's estuarine habitat was destroyed.

We must have a land planning system which regards the environment as a whole system -- and not a parcel of lots, subdivisions, zoning codes, and isolated construction sites. A system that ensures that the critical decisions affecting the balance of development and preservation at the local level, not be at an environmental or human cost.

A number of states, Vermont, Hawaii, and Maine have adopted statewide land use regulatory systems -- all using different techniques, that provide for this.

President Nixon has sent a far-reaching legislative program to the Congress, establishing a National Land Use Policy. In his message to the Congress on the environment he said: "The use of our land not only affects the natural environment, but shapes the pattern of our daily lives."

The legislation already has the strong support of the Senate and House, as well as key environmentalists and developers.

It recognizes that the major obstacle to sound environmental land use planning is not the lack of technology, building skills, or architectural models -- but the lack of government institutions to implement these plans in an orderly and reasoned fashion.

It recognizes that land use control is a state responsibility -- the Federal Government is not trying to usurp the state's role. We are merely urging the states to exercise ~~that~~ role more actively.

It recognizes the need for state involvement only in those local land use decisions that spill over jurisdictional boundaries -- areas of critical environmental concern like estuaries and flood plains, -- growth inducing facilities, like airports and highway interchanges -- and large scale developments of regional importance.

It provides a series of federal grants -- \$20 million a year -- motivating the states to create their own land use plans, and to sharpen their relationship with their own constituent governments at the city and county level.

Those states that do not develop land use procedures, will be penalized through withholding federal monies.

The positive spirit of the President's legislation is quite clear: The Federal Government will provide funding and expertise -- Washington, however, will not be involved in the administration of local land decisions.

Our local zoning ordinances have failed in the most preposterous way to ensure the preservation of vital non-economic values in land use planning. The President's land use legislation will correct this infirmity -- providing a mechanism for continued economic progress that preserves our ecological, cultural, and historic values.

Finally, I would like to discuss some of the major actions we are taking for the future of our fish and wildlife.

In the last decades several thousand tons of lead shot have been deposited into waterfowl habitat -- each pellet, if ingested is capable of killing a duck or shore bird. This Fall we are initiating a pilot program on selected federal hunting areas testing iron shot. Hopefully, this will lead to a program preventing the needless death of millions of waterfowl and shore birds through lead poisoning.

Through close cooperation with Canada and Denmark we have prevented the ultimate destruction of Atlantic Salmon stocks within the next year or two.

Canada has banned all commercial salmon fishing for six years, and the Danes have agreed to phase out commercial salmon fishing on the high seas by 1976.

This program will not only mean the preservation of the Atlantic Salmon, but the chance that someday in the future we will have outstanding salmon sport fishing along the north Atlantic.

You are all familiar with our experience in South San Francisco Bay, where the rich marshlands that provide vital foraging for the waterfowl and shore birds along the Pacific Flyway have been dredged and built upon at an alarming rate.

Through close cooperation with the Congress, a bill creating a wildlife refuge, preserving the values of open space and water for the 4 million people living near San Francisco Bay, has passed both the House and Senate, and hopefully will be signed into law.

I'm sure that you outdoor writers are aware that this will be the first time that we have used money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to create a national wildlife refuge. This is truly a piece of landmark legislation.

We have increased the Duck Stamp fee from \$3 to \$5. Although this represents the third price increase in the last 37 years, it will mean an increase of about 11 million dollars during the next five years to our migratory bird habitat acquisition program.

This measure will add dramatically to accelerating our vital wetlands purchases, as well as allowing us to acquire land at a better price.

We are stepping up our enforcement procedures and are seeking trial of a number of big game hunters and guides who have flagrantly violated state and federal hunting regulations.

Let me put it on the line -- we will pursue maximum criminal action against the unethical hunter who violates state and federal game laws, maligning the reputation of hunting in general.

These are just a few of the actions we are initiating to conserve the integrity of our fish and wildlife for the future.

I would like to conclude with a few words directed to your role in the media.

We're approaching a time when the environmental movement is beginning to backlash against the hunter and fisherman. This wave of anti-hunting sentiment is tragic because we are all working for the same thing: Preservation of wildlife habitat and our natural resources.

It's up to you to relate the principles and accomplishments of good wildlife management to non-hunters and fishermen, as well as castigate the unethical hunter.

It's up to you to represent the vital role hunting and fishing play in conservation, as well as the \$250 million yearly spent by your industry -- much of which goes towards preservation of wildlife.

Only through this kind of action can we maintain a common front among all Americans committed to the protection of our natural resources.

I am asking each of you -- not only as members of one of our most distinguished environmental organizations, but as members of the news media -- to join with us in ensuring that the government of our resources be marked not only with restraint and responsibility, but with courage and vision.

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