



**WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE  
ON NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE POLICY  
Thursday, October 2, 2008**

**Remarks by the Honorable James Connaughton, Chairman, White House Council on Environmental Quality**

Thank you very much. Good afternoon everybody. This has been a great day hasn't it? Just a fabulous day. And I'm particularly pleased that we're all here together for Rob Keck's audition for his next job, so let's give Rob a hand out there in the back. I've had such a great privilege getting to know a lot of you, and getting to know even more of you at this session. And, I have a great privilege working for the President of the United States, and I have a great privilege working on Jackson Place, because Jackson Place actually carries the ghost of Teddy Roosevelt. If any of you read Theodore Rex, there's an amazing scene actually when Teddy Roosevelt actually injured his leg, the White House was being renovated, and he actually holed up on Jackson Place, actually at 722 Jackson Place, which is CEQ's headquarters. So I carry that with me, and whenever I walk into the space in those old houses, he's there.

But, let's think about that. Let's think about 1908. We're here on the hundredth anniversary to celebrate that, and think of it. It was Teddy Roosevelt bringing the governors to Washington to talk about conservation, to deal with the significant issues that were occurring outside of Washington. So, you had T.R. for those couple of days going in and out of the sessions, and you know you had less than fifty governors at the time. Now what would Teddy Roosevelt think today that we're holding a conference in Reno, back out in the land in the area that he loved so much with more than five hundred leaders of the NGO Community, state legislators, senior federal government officials, senior state officials, other interested parties and even the media attending this conversation? I think he'd be proud. And, imagine the army of conservationists that he could only have imagined and he talked about back in 1908, but that has been fulfilled by the presence of all of you here today. So, that's what this conference is about. It's that carry on of the legacy, and it's the fulfillment and the filling out of that vision. So, just reflect on that. It's no longer about the President and governors. It's about all of us working together.

And, let's think of the group that we're here with today. So, I just want to make a few acknowledgements. I'm just so delighted to be here with Dirk Kempthorne, one of the most wonderful Secretaries of Interior I think this nation has ever enjoyed. So, please, Dirk, great to have you. We're looking forward to hearing from Ed Schafer. It's been great to have him on board, and you'll be hearing from him tomorrow. We've had a great working relationship, and he's certainly carried on the legacy of USDA in fulfillment of our conservation mission. And, of course, we have the session leaders

today for the breakouts. I decided this time not to be, you know, be up there in people's face because you're going to have to deal with me now. But, really I wanted to hear what was going on in each of the sessions, and I thought this morning there was a lot of talk from the panels. This afternoon all of you didn't let them get away with it and I was really pleased to see the interchange coming in from the larger groups. So, it was really wonderful to see that unfold today. It's great to be here with Jeff and Dave, and of course, Bob Modell's down here. Let's all give Bob a hand for his work leading the Sporting Conservation Council, which has been so instrumental in getting us to this point.

Just a few more acknowledgements, CEQ, for many of you, you've had a good interface with it, but CEQ is the ultimate in inside baseball. We're the players that work on behalf of the President. We try to keep our heads low, try to get the policy moving. But, this conservation policy is the product of many people. But on my part, in my job I have to acknowledge three in particular. They are three people of this community. They are three men for this community, and even as they change their roles and their positions they remain dedicated to this community. So first of all is David Anderson, who originally worked with me at CEQ. Secondly, is Mitch Butler who's now over at the Department of the Interior, and third Greg Schildwachter. I mean, these guys have done an amazing job, amazing job. And finally on acknowledgements, and then we'll get to the meat of the matter. Just as we got this conversation started with those meetings with the President out on the ranch, we put this conversation in context at the Cooperative Conservation Summit. Pulling this together ain't easy. And, so I just want everybody, if you would, to acknowledge Jim Gasser who's basically been the stage manager of this event who is just a tireless, a tireless civil servant to get this job done right. And, all of the people in the room, and actually the people you don't see right now outside of the room, they all have red ribbons on their badges and it's called "staff". If you could all give them a round of applause, but more importantly, when you leave the room please shake their hand, thank them. They're the ones making this conversation possible, so please give all of them a hand.

Alright, now to the meat of the matter - the meat of the matter. What are we doing here for heaven's sake? Well, I've pleased to work on behalf of President George W. Bush, who is a true conservationist and a true sportsman. When I came on board with the campaign, helping with policy, when you think of all of the things that a candidate has to worry about, when you think of all of the issues that really are sort of the top tier, what gets you elected, what doesn't get you elected, when you think of all of the things that intrude - his passion, his personal dedication to conservation was at the top of the list. When I came into my job and we were working through the agenda of what it is we want to achieve, it wasn't a fly-by-night commitment. It was a commitment. What can we do now? What can we do over four years? And, what can we do through a two-year term? And, we mapped that out. A lot of his personal reflection, a lot of his ideas, his ideas generated from this community, and so really it was the embrace of the work that you had done toward the backend of the '90s and pulling together that shared vision. But, then it was trying to lift that further. How do we move that into the day-to-day thinking and operations of the government? And, not just the traditional allies in the government, and the traditional government people. So, we've tried to carry that forward.

And as you know, the President has said many, many times in many contexts, “We’re going to sprint to the finish.” And, that’s what today is about, at least for us, Dirk Kempthorne, me, Ed Schafer, Mark Rey, you’ve got Lyle Laverly, you’ve got Dale Hall. We’re here to sprint to the finish. That’s why I’m here is to sprint to the finish. And, there is a lot we can do in the months that lie ahead, but as important, is the foundation we are laying for the years that follow.

And, so as we think about our mission here today, we can reflect on the Olympics, right. We all love the Olympics, don’t we? Let’s all reflect. What’s our favorite part of the Olympics? We all have to confess it. We love relay races, right? I mean, as much as you love Michael Phelps, you know going out there all by himself, the cooler race was the relay race. That’s the one we love. The American team doing the track and field relay races. That is what the conservation mission is about. And that’s what this conversation is about. We are one leg of a relay race that’s going to take us through this next century.

The ten-year action plan that we’re working on together that’s going to be the product of today’s conversation is not a ten-year plan, it is the foundation for a one-hundred-year outcome. That’s the way we have to think about this. And so as we sprint to the finish, our finish is the hand-off of the baton to the next administration, to the next Congress, to the next set of governors, to the next set of state officials, to the next set of leaders of your organizations one of whom could well be my son, your daughter. That is what this conversation is about, so we have to know that. It’s not about any individual group or any individual one of us leaders.

And, so I want to then put in context, sort of start a little bit personally and then I’ll go out a little bit wonky, policy wonky, but I want to start personally because what is the hand-off about? The hand-off is about the person you’re handing to being equipped to take a clean hand-off and run with it. Those people, of course, are our kids. I’m a proud father of a seventeen-year-old, and a proud father of a fourteen-year-old. My seventeen-year-old boy just made Eagle Scout. My daughter is a girl who could be the next nature artist. You wouldn’t imagine her connection with the out-of-doors. These are the people we’re reaching. They are the next generation of leaders. But not just leaders, it’s “livers”. It’s the next generation of people who find in the out-of-doors that livelihood, okay, that part of life that has nothing to do with earning a living. It has nothing to do with what you’re studying in school. It’s that being that we all find in whatever the pursuit is, whether it’s hunting or fishing or sailing. Whatever that pursuit is, it’s finding that very personal space in the out-of-doors. And so as I think of that, and I think it’s not just the experience.

I just want to share with you an anecdote. My son’s a Boy Scout as I indicated. What is it special about the out-of-door experience? It’s not the gear. It’s actually not the take-down. It’s not the, you know, catching that fish on the hook. It’s not making that rounding on the sailboat mark. It’s not even discovering that really cool eel when you’re scuba diving. What I find most interesting and important about the out-of-doors with our kids, I call it the “hour-in” time. Okay, now, what does that mean? The hour-in time,

Well, whatever I'm doing, it's when I'm an hour in to the hike, that all of a sudden my son starts opening it up and telling me all kinds of wild stuff I never heard before. Right? It's that hour in to the bike with my daughter when all of the sudden she says "You know, Daddy," and she'll tell some problem she was having at school. It's that hour-in after we've done the dive and we're about to change gear and we're waiting to do the next dive, that my son comes up with the most incredible idea for a new business that one could ever imagine, and he really wants to talk to me about it. But, you know, the day-to-day running home from work, doing dinner, getting homework done you don't have the time to just have that occur. And, so when you think of the hunting experience, it's the hunting, it's that experience. It's the fishing experience. It's the hiking experience that let's you settle in to that kind of connection that we often lose in our more highly-urbanized existence. That is what we're doing here, okay, so I just want to be sure as we think of all of the mechanics of what we're disassembling, it's enabling that experience, that community, that family experience, that's what we're doing.

And, so how do we get that? How do we get that? Today's conversation's all across the board. We talked about marketing, and how do we get more people involved? Everybody was energized. Without saying it, we're trying to get the tools that allow that experience to happen. So, in keeping with that, I just want to offer you some of my ideas to add to the hundreds that I heard today that have all now been recorded. There's a lot of talk about getting kids out for the hunting experience. A lot of talk. How do we get more kids out? Talk about getting it into the curriculum. I think all of that's good, but it's still the case you just got to have the experience. Somebody who loves to hunt has to share that experience with someone who's never been hunting. I still think that's the most vital component. And, all too often when we do our activities, I'm guilty of it too, I tend to grab the people who already like it and I bring them with me. And, I don't stop and say "Oh, who are the four people that have never gone before I'm going to show it to?" And, until every one of us says "Every next trip we take we're going to take someone who's never done it before", we're really not going to make the level of progress that we've talked about today. And, this is not just bringing a kid along. You actually have to bring some parents along too. My wife has never been hunting. I bet she'd love it. I bet she has no interest in shooting, by the way, but I bet she'd love to go along. Once she does one or two trips, she's going to be hooked. But, we haven't had that experience with her yet. There are people I know who, you know, who I do with Boy Scouts. Okay, there are men I know, they have just never been hunting, so they would feel very awkward bringing their sons hunting. And, unless you're bringing them with their son hunting, they're not going to really get it. So, there are some actually people, you know, in our generation, in my generation, who themselves need some mentors to really understand this experience. So, that's sort of one. There's a gap, not just with the kids, but also with some parents. And, so we've got to fill that gap.

Two, we heard about marketing. One of the most powerful tools of marketing is cross-selling. Why is Burger King right next door to McDonald's right next door to KFC? Why is Applebee's right next door to Ruby Tuesdays? Because after awhile, the people who kept going to Ruby Tuesdays say "Oh, let's go someplace else but let's hope it's similar". And, so they go right next door to the next shop. Cross-selling is a huge

opportunity for the hunting community. There are kids who are out there skateboarding, outside spending hours skateboarding. Kids who are scuba diving. Kids who are mountain-biking. Kids who are athletes on teams. Kids who go river rafting or kids who go sailing. If those kids will go out for those experiences, give them a few hours out hunting, you're going to have them hooked too. And, the convenient thing about hunting, by the way, is some of these other sports you kind of age-out of them, I hate to say it, but hunting you've got for life. So, let's look for the opportunities to cross-sell.

Third, finally, is kids in their own domain. Face it, a bunch of us are old fogies and I think I count in that category now. It was Jack Welch at GE who had the inspiration, he told every one of his business leaders when the computer boom was really starting to happen in the early '90s, he required every one of them to hire a teenage kid and parked them next to them so they could teach the leaders about how the computer world works. How the Internet works. How those kids are thinking. They shadowed those business leaders full-time. You know, these kids out-of-college, who really knew the tech world full-time. We have to understand the kids in that domain and see what translates from that domain into this experience. And, it's great because there is all kinds of great gear and opportunity to make those inter-linkages. It just hasn't happened yet. So, we have to be a little bit humble and say "Hey, what is it kids can teach us about how to make this experience more vital, more interesting, more relevant and exciting with the way that they interact with each other and with the outer world?". So, that's sort of my issue on access and awareness and education. How we begin to build and rebuild the hunting community.

Now, how do we get them there? What's the big picture? What are we after? We were back with Jeff and Dave and Rob and the question was "So now what?", "So now what?". So let me answer the "So now what?" question. First, I talked about the high-level vision, that reconnection. But, that reconnection comes with providing access and opportunities. Back in St. Louis when we had the Cooperative Conservation Summit, I laid out four organizing concepts, and I'm really delighted as I stand here today, that we have continued to make progress on them. But, I think that we still have to have in mind in the age of Google Earth the principles of greenways, blueways, flyways and byways. And the idea is on this great nation, this national map, you know we look at a map and we see roadways and pipelines and transmission lines and cities. Then every now and again, you see these parks, right, and it's like a soup where, you know, you have a park here, a park here and a park there. This community knows better than anyone else, it's the interconnection of our landscapes. It's the relationship of our landscape to the blueway and flyway. It's the experience of going to these zones and having a sense of history that you can attach yourself to, which are the byways - the traditions, the old cabins, the old places.

If we can create together a one-hundred-year vision of interconnecting these places so that what was a gray and brown and asphalt-based map that we look at every day turns into a tapestry of green and blue, you know, and rich orange, that as an organizing principle will help us knit together these habitats that then we can all go frolic upon, both public and private.

So, how do we get there? This ten- year plan we're working on is going to have a series of actions, but also a series of institutional arrangements that are going to help us carry that forward. And so as we work our plan, with Dirk and with Ed and the others, we are we are dedicating the next three and one-half months to ensuring that the senior career leadership of the agencies has a clear set of direction that they can carry forward with the ability of whoever the new President is to modify, to amend, to change. But, we are not going to leave a blank slate. Together, we are going to leave a full menu and those menus will have opportunities and actions that will keep the federal process alive as the government restaffs up. That will provide a whole series of initiatives for the next President, whoever he may be, to take full credit and put his name on it.

This is a relay race, right? This is the team that we do together. And so, the more aggressive we are the next three-and-one-half months in defining more and more of these opportunities, we can hope that all of them are followed up on. But, they are only as good as the institutional frameworks. And so, we got a lot of advice on that here today, and we're going to carry that advice forward. Some things we'll be able to say "relatively soon, so stay tuned", other things we'll need to work on over the next coming months. But, we have to institutionalize this so it doesn't ride on the power of individuals. So, it doesn't rest alone on Dirk Kempthorne or on Jeff or on Dave. So that it's actually a living process that everyone's part of and can buy in to. That's what we're going to do as well.

And so, with our Olympic analogy in mind, I ask all of you: "Are you running as fast as you can?"; "Do you have a good grip on the baton?"; and "Is the person ahead of you ready to reach back and receive it cleanly and race ahead even faster?". That's the challenge we all face, and the great thing about America is we know we tend to get the gold in those events. So, look forward to working with you.