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# Letter From the Secretary

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**T**he values of our National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Historic Sites, and other public lands are legion: the value of Nature for its own sake - a source of wonder and enjoyment; the value of learning about the workings of the natural world and the lives of past generations and civilizations; the value of the surviving multitudes of wild species that flourish as part of the natural systems on which we too depend; the incredible economic value that comes from tourism and the forward-looking use of natural resources; and the value of simply knowing it's all there and that it will be there for our children and theirs.

With responsibility for over 500 million acres of land, the Department of the Interior is the steward of much of this natural and cultural inheritance, protector of our national parks and magnificent wildlife, gateway to vast expanses of forests, mountains, rivers and grasslands, and caretaker of countless historic places steeped in the traditions and values of those who have gone before us. Part of our ethic of stewardship is the conservation and management of the incredible wealth of natural resources that has given us the wherewithal to build a thriving country. Whether it is the delivery of water to arid Western states or the development of oil and gas reserves, the Department of the Interior is a major contributor to the growth of this country. Striking a balance between conservation and development is, of course, no simple task.

We also stand in a special relationship with Native Americans. While the Federal trust obligation lies at the heart of this special relationship, the scope of our responsibilities to American Indians extends beyond basic trust obligations to include a wide range of Federal service obligations delivered in concert with Indian Self Determination. We are committed to a meaningful self-determination policy under which Indian people fully participate in the planning, conduct, and administration of Indian programs and services, including education and public safety.

During the last three years, President Clinton's Interior Department has moved on a number of fronts to resolve some of the country's most intractable environmental problems. In the Pacific Northwest, we used the best science to develop a forest plan for federal lands that would preserve the old growth forests and endangered species and continue to provide employment for workers in timber communities. In South Florida we took the restoration of the Everglades out of the courts and into the marshes, beginning the largest environmental restoration project in history to protect both the

natural beauty of South Florida and the water supply for millions of people.

Just this summer, we put in place a new way of doing business on western rangelands by enlisting community members representing the diversity of interests that need to be considered when making decisions about the health of the land. And all over the country, from the coast of Southern California to the pine forests of the South, we've stepped into emerging conflicts over endangered species protections to work out real solutions that protect jobs and allow development to proceed while at the same time setting aside important habitat for threatened species.

We have also looked ahead and taken steps to prevent conflicts. In the first three years of the Clinton Administration's stewardship, we have gone about the extraordinary task of managing our national inheritance under the floodlight of good science and in a way that will ensure that the decisions we make today don't have unintended negative ramifications tomorrow. We've separated science from regulation. And even while overall budgets are going down, we've maintained our commitment to science as insurance against the unknown, be it earthquakes or endangered wildlife, and as our single most important tool for managing the diversity of the American landscape.

Finally, we've guided all of our actions by the standard of sustainability, asking ourselves at every turn: "How will this decision affect the beauty, integrity, and availability of this resource for our children?" History has taught us the folly of living for the present and taking for granted the plenty that Nature has given us and that our forerunners have conserved for us. The land is a mirror to our national soul. How we treat it will reflect on us forever and will be the grounds for our judgment by future generations of Americans.

**BRUCE BABBITT**  
*Secretary of the Interior*