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Resource Management Thrusts and Opportunities: National Parks and Wildlife Refuges

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It's always a pleasure to participate in the North American. And it's especially good to be here this year to share with you some of the more important accomplishments made this year on behalf of our national parks, wildlife refuges and wildlife conservation programs.

It has been an interesting year indeed since the last North American. A year ago at the Conference held in Washington, D.C., Interior Secretary Jim Watt outlined some of the Administration's goals and some of his personal goals in resource management, and the role resources could play in economic recovery and energy independence for the U.S. His message was clear and precise. There would be orderly, phased development. There would be resource use as well as resource protection. And development wouldn't be at the unnecessary expense of natural resources.

Well, it's been an interesting year. Somehow, it got to be very convenient for some folks to misconstrue what the Secretary had said. Some of those folks just seemed determined to make James Watt a household name—and they succeeded. And those same folks succeeded, too, in increasing the membership roles of a few of the environmental groups. But I don't think they succeeded very well in listening to and understanding what the Secretary said a year ago. . . . So, as succinctly and plainly as possible, I will spell out again that the goals of this Administration weren't designed to create the perfect agenda for environmentalism, nor for development interests for that matter. The goals weren't pipe-dream perfection stuff for anybody . . . but common sense management, balanced economic growth geared to benefit the entire country . . . through orderly phased development and resource use based on wise, scientific wildlife, fishery and resources management. And I'm happy to say we've stuck to that original goal—no matter how others have tried to bungle it or misinterpret it—and I'm delighted to report we've made some pretty important achievements in the last year.

Now, remember back about a year or so ago, how some would have you believe that our goals were to develop hit lists on the national wildlife refuges . . . to sell off and drill for oil in national parks . . . and to draw a bead, figuratively if not literally, on endangered species. Well, in all three instances just the opposite took place, as we intended: we increased the size of the National Wildlife Refuge System (adding some critically important bottomland hardwood habitats too). We initiated stronger and more effective policies to address the real-world policies of maintenance and human safety in our national parks by adding \$191 million to the park budget. And we nearly doubled the number of recovery plans for endangered species over 1980. These are just a few of our accomplishments—I'll mention more in a little while.

The point to be made for now is that . . . the Jeremiahs may have had their fun predicting gloom and doom . . . and the Chicken Littles have had their hour running

around bumping into everything and shouting about all manner of woes . . . but the fact remains, there are conservation programs underway now that are as sound as—or more sound than—any that have gone before. There is continuity to our conservation efforts; there has been perseverance to get the job done under tight fiscal circumstances; and there have been many outstanding achievements made for American resources and the American people by the professionals in the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service.

This has been a year of changes, to be sure. This is what Ronald Reagan promised the American people during the campaign. Many of the changes were brought about directly because of budget cuts. Some other changes were less fiscal than philosophical . . . For example, the need to be good neighbors, to work more closely with the States . . . the need to be more cooperative, not just with *some* conservation groups (as it had been in the past) but with all the public, including developers. These objectives made sense a year ago and they make sense today. Our original agenda remains unchanged.

One of our special objectives is better, more believable, more solid information on our resources, our parks, wildlife and wildlands. We don't need pious guestimates; we don't need glittering ecological generalizations. There was entirely too much of that in the past and a lot of erroneous conclusions and questionable resource decisions were the result. The public has enjoyed about as much of that as it can stand! Instead, we need believable data interpretation; we need complete information. We need data on wildlife and resources, on our parks and refuges; and we want it comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date. We can ill afford to editorialize on wildlife populations if all we have are questionable shreds of data. Sooner or later, it's a bluff that will be called—and then, truly, resources will be imperiled.

Obviously, good information doesn't come cheap. It costs money and these are pretty tight times for the natural resource community. But you can get the most for your dollar by planning to spend it wisely and keeping tabs on the progress of your projects.

The National Park Service has taken some encouraging steps toward improving its baseline information. Surprisingly, few parks have ever had an adequate inventory of their resources. Few have had adequate information to implement enlightened management strategies. Knowledge of the identity and location of park resources is essential to sound park management. Hence, high priority will be given to conducting field studies of all types of resources—the physical, biological, archeological and historical.

This system will take time to implement. It'll cost money, too. But it will be worth it. It will be an investment in good management—a system that addresses the reality of the park resources and a system that can quickly and efficiently convey this information to managers. And in reference to the National Parks, I'm sure you all remember when Secretary Watt declared those famous words: "We'll fix the plumbing." Well, indeed we will. Now, park maintenance is not a glamorous topic in the conservation community. In fact, you'll find a few Park Service employees in the regional and Washington offices whose eyes begin to glaze over at the mere mention of the topic. But . . . with park superintendents, with park staff, and with park visitors, it's a most welcomed goal. They know and have known the maintenance problems that plague many of the parks' facilities. It's far

from being a frivolous matter. Human health and safety are at issue . . . as well as basic enjoyment of our parks, for the majority of our citizens who want to use them. Everyone knows that some wilderness areas are wonderful and inspirational—for those who enjoy them—but, wilderness isn't for everyone. In fact, it's used by very few—mostly the young and hardy who have the necessary time to acquire a wilderness experience.

Most people, however, are limited. They want a good, safe, accessible park. They want facilities they can use; facilities that work; drinking water that's safe; a place to rest, to change the baby's diaper . . . These are just a few of the reasons why we doubled our requested funding over what the previous Administration wanted to start correcting these problems. And the Congress is supporting this initiative—as we seek one billion dollars over the next five years to restore and improve the National Parks.

In line with this, we instituted a near moratorium on park land fee acquisition. I know that some of you and a few groups would and do argue that, in the face of increasing inflation and human populations, we must set aside as much park land as possible right now, today, in order to meet future demand. I understand what they're trying to get at in their argument; but, I don't think it's likely, realistic or all that desirable to make a direct linkage between population growth and Federal acquisition of park lands. The real pressures exerted by the current human population—and the increasing human use of the parks each year—suggest strongly that we better take care first and foremost of those parks we have . . . before their values are hopelessly compromised and their resources irretrievably lost and “loved to death.” That's why the immediate issue . . . practical day-in and day-out care and maintenance of our National Parks . . . must not be slighted. Let's show the parks and the people who use them some basic, genuine respect: let's fix up the parks; let's encourage folks to use them; let's keep the parks properly maintained in a systematic, conscientious ongoing way . . . so there won't have to be a repeat of this kind of situation we're faced with now to try to correct so many years of neglect and underfunding.

I'm sure that many of you are aware of some of the more publicized changes this past year within the Fish and Wildlife Service. While the overall thrust of these reported changes may have emphasized budget cuts, there was an overriding managerial goal as well—to manage better, to get back to the essentials and stress the core missions of the Service. One of the more visible changes was the closure of Area Offices. By September 30, they will be closed. Some of the Area Offices' staff will be reassigned to the Regional Offices, but many will be placed where they are needed most—at the project level, at the field level, closer to the resource. The closure of Area Offices was not, I should emphasize, strictly a budget move. It was not intended as a fiscal response. It was motivated by the recognition that the Service needed to streamline its chain of command. It needed to improve the link between field stations and regional offices. Now, this is not to say the Area Office concept has not performed some valuable jobs for the Service and provided some valuable assistance to the States. But in the wider perspective—taking in not only the current budget pictures, but also management and resource needs—the time was right for a change.

I realize the closure of Area Offices may strike some as something of a contradiction to the Department's overall “good neighbor” policy and to our repeated

goal of working more closely with the States. . . . I'll grant that an Area Office was usually closer, geographically, to individual State wildlife agencies. But, day in and day out, States found that they still had to conduct much, if not most, of their dealings with regional offices . . . though it sometimes took several phone calls between States, Area and Regional offices to sort that out . . . So, with the shift back to regional operations, the Service will be making concerted efforts to maintain continuing and even better communications with each State within that region. Close cooperation in something as important as wildlife resource protection and management cannot be left to chance. The Service will have to initiate continuous, productive outreach to State sportsmen groups, wildlife agencies, and political leaders to learn what they're doing, what's going on, to find out what the States see as important. The Fish and Wildlife Service can't afford to conduct its planning or activities in a vacuum. The Service needs State input, State advice to achieve a balanced view on which to base its plans and commit its fiscal and manpower resources.

The "good neighbor" policy you heard about is offered to the States, to be sure. It is also for the benefit of the resource and the general public. In the case of refuges, it means taking a good hard look at the issue of access. And asking some direct questions to see if there aren't ways to manage and protect wildlife *and* to accommodate legitimate and valid human uses that won't compromise or interfere with the resource. We have made decisions on the Pea Island and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuges, for example, that illustrate well our commitment to safeguard resources and recognize the reality of public needs. We also want to increase the recreational potential, within reason and within limits, on national wildlife refuges. As many of you are aware, the recently completed 1980 National Hunting and Fishery Survey indicates that once again, Americans are not only interested in the outdoors, they're actively pursuing outdoor recreation. Carefully managed and with conscientiously applied programs, the refuges can afford excellent recreational opportunities for millions of Americans.

One of our most important resource management goals in the 1980s will be to help those millions of Americans who treasure wildlife . . . to help them to better understand wildlife . . . to learn about the habitat that wildlife require . . . about wildlife management, how it works, why it works, and why we need more, rather than less, good sound scientific wildlife management in the years and decades ahead.

It may be all well and good for some people to entertain fantasies about peaceable kingdoms where wild creatures are ever in harmony and balance, and where the lamb and the lion will lie together. Well, there may be a garden of Eden that exists on this planet, but I'm not sure. However, our collective experiences, our observations and our records tell us that without wildlife conservation, without the benefit of wildlife management, many species of wildlife would be gone today. Wildlife management has been a success. Sound scientific management can continue to bring solid results; it's no time to back away from it now. As mentioned earlier, in the Park Service and in the Fish and Wildlife Service, there is an increased emphasis on basic information, reliable information . . . and practical, realistic solutions. Wildlife management is a day-to-day pursuit. It's work that requires diligence and a sense of commitment. There are no technological substi-

tutes for a good, practical wildlife biologist or a good, common-sense wildlife manager.

Our resource budgets may remain tight for some time yet. Our resource decisions in the future may be more challenging than at any time in the past. The need to develop and better utilize our natural resources is real; it won't go away. The need for resource managers and for the public alike is to realize that there can be protection along with development; there can be wise use. There can be common sense, and there can be cooperation. And I pledge you my best efforts to help bring about a balance that will get America moving again without sacrificing our environment or wildlife resources.