

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE ROGERS C. B. MORTON,
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND GAME AND CONSERVATION
COMMISSIONERS, ORLANDO, FLORIDA, SEPTEMBER 10, 1973

This evening I would like to give you my views on a number of most pressing issues that all of us face together. Before doing that, however, I would like to reaffirm my belief that meeting the challenges of the environment rests ultimately on continuing cooperation between State and Federal agencies. No one individual, and no one agency, has a monopoly on enlightenment, or good sense.

ENFORCEMENT

One of the major areas for increased State and Federal cooperation is enforcement. I have asked Secretary Reed to expand Interior's enforcement efforts and to increase the field agents, special investigators, and officers in the field and at our ports of entry. The key fact, however, is that the Federal Government cannot and should not do everything.

Each of us face the same kinds of questions:

- Are we protecting our wildlife populations?
- Are our bag limits fair to the hunter and fisherman and to the future of our wildlife?
- Are we doing enough to put an end to poaching, especially in view of the resurgence in deer poaching as result of food price increases?
- Are our flyway policies equitable not only to the hunters within individual States but to all the States?

Without commitment and positive action at the local level we will be unable to face these kinds of questions and to come up with solutions that work. Aside from that each of us faces the continuing--perhaps I should say growing need to put a maximum effort to stop the illegal or slob hunter who is ruining the heritage and sport of hunting and fishing in the out-of-doors.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

There is little question that endangered species has become the most dramatic symbol of America's environmental concerns. While some of you may not find this a cheering statement, the preservation of threatened species--and I mean habitat and everything that contributes to sustaining wildlife population--is still primarily a State responsibility. Let's not be mistaken, if the States fail to act positively, the American people are going to rightfully demand that the Federal Government move in and take over this vital program. I, frankly, believe you and your agencies are in the best position to safeguard our threatened species. You are closest to the problems--and the solutions.

LEAD SHOT

If there is one dimension of the lead shot controversy that everyone agrees upon, it is that too many birds--certainly millions--die each year because of crippling or lead poisoning. We have had documented evidence of both lead poisoning and crippling for decades, yet both problems remained largely unresolved.

Your association has given strong support in the field, and in the public media to bring this matter to a solution. I appreciate your efforts and frankly, hope you will continue to press at a working level for the early implementation of a national program to reduce needless deaths along our flyways.

I have instructed the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife to prepare an environmental impact statement reviewing all aspects of lead shot, as well as our alternatives. It also is a matter of common knowledge and public speculation that I am actively considering the adoption of a conversion schedule from lead to iron shot in at least one flyway during the 1974 season, followed by mandatory nationwide use of iron shot in 1975. Certainly these options will be among the alternatives explored through the NEPA process.

Deriving a reasoned and unimpassioned end to the unnecessary loss of critical waterfowl populations is an item of the highest priority--and it is a matter that I can assure we will act upon without delay.

In my own view, far too much money has been spent in public relations. Far too much has been said about crippling--although I'm not going to deny that crippling is a major problem. But far too little has been said about putting lead poison into the environment. One thing I am convinced of, is that all of us use the word "toxic" too lightly. Toxic means poison. And it only takes two pellets in the craw to kill a duck. Let's not lose sight of that fact that shotguns are a lethal weapon at short ranges--under 45 yards. Regardless of the final action we take on lead shot, one thing is obvious, too many hunters lack an awareness of the effective range of their own weapons. And I suggest that anyone here who disagrees with me spend opening day in a duck blind on the Eastern Shore.

What we can and must do now, is to implement a positive campaign on Federal refuges, and State waterfowl areas, and at every possible level to educate the hunter on the range and most important, the limitations of the shotgun.

Until both problems are met with hard solutions, the future of our bird populations, and hunting as we know it, will be threatened.

PREDATOR CONTROL

The President's Executive Order on Predator Control last year opened the direction to a reasoned and enlightened policy towards predator control. I believe that we are moving in the right direction in this area, and would especially like to express my appreciation to the Commissioners from the Western States for their cooperation in attempting to solve the predator dilemma.

COASTAL ZONE

The aberration that wetlands, estuaries and coastal zones can be turned into "productive lands" by dredging, damming, and developing is, unfortunately, as old as the Republic. A number of historians, for example, have suggested that George Washington's entry into public service was the result of financial losses he sustained after a disastrous attempt to reclaim part of Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp for farming. The Swamp is still there, although much smaller than it once was.

Unfortunately, however, there is still too much development along our coastal zones, in spite of the fact that many States have passed land use and coastal zone legislation.

Too many of our marshes have been filled; too many of our swamps have been drained and filled; and too many of our estuaries have been dammed and channeled.

While there are limitations to the Federal Government's responsibilities and authority in the coastal zone--there is much you can do within your own State governments. We simply cannot afford to stand back idly while the vital habitat, and breeding grounds for our coastal fisheries are disturbed, or altogether destroyed.

CONCLUSION

These issues are the very sinew of the challenges and opportunities in the environment. Regretably, our ability to meet those challenges and grasp those opportunities continues to rely on economic values, technicalities of law, and brute political pressure.

Let's not be mistaken, change is hard enough to make when you're not running against well worn attitudes, and accepted values. As environmentalists, we're running against both. And if you don't believe me, look at the kind of delays we have faced in enacting vital environmental legislation:

--America desperately needs land use planning to ensure that economic needs match with environmental needs in the way we use our most essential resource--our land.

--America desperately needs mined land reclamation to ensure that we match environmental needs with energy needs, and put an end to despoiling the fragile character of our land and water.

--America desperately needs a functional system of government that is sensitive to human needs and environmental needs. Without a Department of Energy and Natural Resources at the Federal level, all of us--and this impacts especially on the States--will continue to depend upon a management framework designed around old priorities to solve today's problems.

There is no question, our environment and our people have waited too long. Hopefully, a spirit of bipartisanship in the Congress, as well as strong support across the country will help us shape environmental concerns into new programs, new actions, and new values.

Aldo Leopold wrote in his insightful essay, "The Land Ethic":
 "Conservation is a state of harmony between man and land. Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and convention oratory. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forwards stride."

I believe that the current has changed and the tide of conservation is moving in the other direction. It's shifting because of your efforts, and the dedication and commitment of people in Washington like Nat Reed. Each of us knows what has to be done.

While the environmental issues we face may be more complex and more subtle than they were in Aldo Leopold's era, the gulf between pieties and action **is** still there. However, only by working together in a common spirit of cooperation and commitment, will we be able to bring the two together.

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