

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Walker (202) 343-3171

For Release 9:30 a.m. (EST) March 23, 1981

SECRETARY WATT OUTLINES CONSERVATION POLICY TO AVERT CRISES AND TO SERVE PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Interior Secretary James Watt told leading conservationists today that "we will use the resources of the earth, but we will do so with the knowledge that mankind has been sustained by this earth for thousands of years and will be dependent upon it for generations to come."

In keynoting the 46th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Washington, D.C., Watt emphasized that the Administration under President Reagan "will be in the mainstream of the conservation-environmental movement of America."

"There are four solid cornerstones in this Administration's conservation policy," Watt said.

"1. America must have a sound economy if it is to be a good steward of its fish and wildlife, its parks, and all of its natural resources.

"2. America must have orderly development of its vast energy resources to avert a crisis development which could be catastrophic to the environment.

"3. America's resources were put here for the enjoyment and use of people, now and in the future, and should not be denied to the people by elitist groups.

"4. America has the expertise to manage and use resources wisely, and much of that expertise is in State Government and in the private sector."

The Secretary said he will work not only to find a balance between competing uses of resources today, but will seek to balance how much we can use today without depriving future generations of the resources they too will need.

Some Federal conservation programs have been cut back or consolidated, Watt said, as part of the mandate from the public "for an end to inflationary over-spending and suffocating overregulation by the Federal government."

"Throughout the Department there has been a severe belt-tightening," Watt said. "We have looked at all programs; we have put many on the shelf. Some of these programs will come off the shelf in better economic times."

The Secretary said that faster but orderly development of energy and mineral resources is sound environmental policy.

"If orderly development of our energy resources with proper environmental safeguards is not allowed," Watt warned, "economic, political or social pressures could force the Federal government to order a crash program under crisis conditions to develop energy resources. If this were to occur, the destruction of our fragile ecological system could be experienced -- particularly in my native West."

(more)

Emphasizing the Department's "Good Neighbor" policy, Watt said: "On all fronts we will be removing unneeded regulations and policies which have irritated people not only in the West but all over this country."

Watt said that the key to conservation is enlightened management of resources.

"Conservation is not the blind locking away of huge areas and their resources because of emotional appeals," Watt said. "Man has altered nature. He must now provide a balance in the use of nature's provisions. It is an awesome responsibility and one we cannot shirk."

x x x

Prepared Remarks of The Honorable James Watt
Secretary of the Interior
To The 46th North American Wildlife
and Natural Resources Conference
Washington, D.C.
March 23, 1981

Thank you for providing this excellent forum for my first speaking engagement as Secretary of the Interior. I am happy for the opportunity to address this gathering of North America's leading conservationists and authorities on fish and wildlife.

Two months ago today I was confirmed by the Senate and sworn in at the White House. Since that time I have been immersed in the intricacies of reshaping the Department and enmeshed in discussions with congressional committees. During these two months I have made some major changes in the policies of the Department.

These actions have caused tremors in some segments of the conservation community. But let there be no mistaken views, this Administration will be in the mainstream of the conservation-environmental movement of America. Our management will be made up of real professionals.

The top two officials in the fish and wildlife areas of the Reagan Administration will be professional wildlife managers with experience as the chief executive officers of State fish and wildlife programs. In addition, we of the Reagan Administration have a proven and highly respected professional to head the National Park Service.

Today I want to share with you some of my views on conservation. I want to give you some of the reasoning for the actions which I have taken and will be taking.

There are four solid cornerstones in this Administration's conservation policy:

1. America must have a sound economy if it is to be a good steward of its fish and wildlife, its parks, and all of its natural resources.

2. America must have orderly development of its vast energy resources to avert a crisis development which could be catastrophic to the environment.

3. America's resources were put here for the enjoyment and use of people, now and in the future, and should not be denied to the people by elitist groups.

4. America has the expertise to manage and use resources wisely, and much of that expertise is in State Government and in the private sector.

All the actions which President Reagan or I have taken which impact upon conservation grow out of these principles.

This Administration is conservative.

Conservatives believe in conservation -- it's basic to our philosophy.

We all want our children and grandchildren -- all who come after us -- to have the opportunity to experience nature -- to exult in the beauty of this country.

We will use the resources of the earth, but we will do so with the knowledge that mankind has been sustained by this earth for thousands of years and will be dependent upon it for generations to come.

When I became Secretary of the Interior I took an oath to uphold the law of the Nation which calls for the preservation of some lands and the development of other lands. This means finding a balance between competing uses. It also means finding that balance between how much we can use today without depriving future generations of Americans of the resources they too will need.

This is what I swore to when I took the oath of office; this is what I believe in. This is what the President believes in.

Let's look at the four principles a little closer.

First, rebuilding the American economy as a prerequisite to continued strong conservation.

In November the American people demonstrated that they agree our Nation is in grave economic peril. They gave an overwhelming mandate for an end to inflationary overspending and suffocating overregulation by the Federal Government.

Those of us in the Reagan Administration are committed to fulfilling this mandate.

I have responded by cutting more than one and one-quarter billion dollars from the Department's current budget and proposed budget for 1982.

Some of these cuts are being accomplished through consolidation of redundant functions. In one instance we are shifting essential functions of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service to the National Park Service. In another, we propose replacing the Water Resources Council and Office of Water Research and Technology with a more efficient Office of Water Policy.

We are cutting out all State grants under the Land and Water Conservation Fund and limiting Federal acquisition expenditures to \$45 million -- and only for emergencies. We believe a good steward learns to take care of what he has before he takes on additional responsibilities. Where park expansion is critically needed, we will seek to work out exchanges of land with existing owners.

Throughout the Department there has been a severe belt tightening.

We have looked at all programs; we have put many on the shelf.

Some of these programs will come off the shelf in better economic times.

We believe we have used wisdom in making these decisions. Congress has the final responsibility.

Moving on to the second cornerstone of conservation policy -- the need for accelerated economic development on the public lands, especially for energy and strategic minerals.

America is desperately in need of a national minerals policy which enables us to develop our own resources so that we will not be dependent upon imports from nations which could cut off supplies at any time or which could bankrupt us. Our national security and our economic well-being are both at stake because we have neglected the development of a meaningful minerals policy. This Administration will take action to safeguard the Nation.

I am making adjustments in policy to see that we have orderly exploration and development of needed energy and other mineral resources. We will do this in consultation with the States, with local governments, and with private landowners who would be impacted. And we will do it with full regard for the fish, wildlife and other natural values.

If orderly development of our energy resources with proper environmental safeguards is not allowed, economic, political, or social pressures could force the Federal Government to order a crash program under crisis conditions to develop the energy resources. If this were to occur, the destruction of our fragile ecological system could be experienced -- particularly in my native West.

The third principle I listed at the outset is an orientation toward people.

This Administration will be a good neighbor to the users of public lands and to the States. On all fronts we will be removing unneeded regulations and policies which have irritated people not only in the West but all over this country.

Our public lands, our forests, our parks, our refuges, our wilderness, our wild and scenic rivers -- all should be managed in ways which directly or ultimately serve the needs of people.

Our wildlife and fishery management programs, including our endangered species programs -- these exist because it is in the interest of mankind to maintain a balanced and healthy natural world.

Some areas must be set aside primarily for wildlife and fish.

Other areas should be more intensively used. People make these decisions.

Look at our national park system. This was created so that people could forever share and enjoy the greatest natural treasures. It was not created to lock the treasures away from the people.

In recent years the National Park Service has been pressured to grab for more and more lands. It has been pushed into recreation areas which might more properly be the domain of the cities, the counties or the States.

Our parks and facilities have been deteriorating.

The public's access to the parks is being eroded.

Our National Park Service has been fighting a valiant but losing battle.

It's time to retarget our efforts and our money.

It's time to round out the Federal estate.

That's why I propose a halt to expansion of the park system.

That's why we need to look at what we have to make sure that it consists only of that which is truly unique and of national significance. We should not squander national tax dollars on non-national lands.

That's why we are asking Congress to allocate \$105 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for park maintenance and restoration.

We want to see the truly national parks improved so that they can be used by the people.

We do not believe that the parks nor any of our resources should be held for the exclusive enjoyment of the elite.

At the same time, we understand fully that there must be management which will assure that our use and enjoyment of parks, refuges, seashores and other areas does not in itself destroy them. We will not throw the gates open and say "Here they are, folks, help yourself." We will manage the lands.

This Administration has the confidence that our country has the expertise and the self-discipline to manage our resources properly.

We believe that the key to conservation is management.

Conservation is not the blind locking away of huge areas and their resources because of emotional appeals.

Man has altered nature. He must now provide a balance in the use of Nature's provisions. It is an awesome responsibility and one we cannot shirk.

Wildlife and resources managers must be allowed to manage by the best scientific knowledge available and not be deterred from their task by emotionalism.

In this Administration we will be looking more and more to user groups to help pay the bill for this management. The Pittman-Robertson and the Dingell-Johnson programs have been great. Now there is some sentiment for expansion, and I applaud that possibility.

On the international front, we will be careful not to make agreements which are detrimental to State and Federal fish and wildlife programs.

In our conservation programs, we will be targeting our dollars to get the most management out of our investment. We're going to channel the available funds "to the ground" -- the refuges, wildlife ranges, parks and public lands.

We are retargeting our effort in the Endangered Species Program so that we can try to help species recover rather than compiling endless lists of those which are endangered or threatened. The Endangered Species Program will be managed for scientific purposes not for political or philosophical objectives.

These are some of the actions which we have taken in these past two months, and some of the thinking behind our actions.

My job is not an easy job, but it has its satisfactions. It is a pleasure to work with a President who understands natural resource issues. When I talk about BLM or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or some other important resource managing agency, the President understands immediately. As Governor of our most populated State, with 50 percent of its land Federally owned, he learned about wildlife and about natural resources and he learned well. He is a man who has a great love for the outdoors, but who loves his country so much that he now finds himself able to enjoy the outdoors only on very limited occasions.

Let me close by reading a brief message from the President which pretty well summarizes and emphasizes what I have said:

"Our natural resources are a precious heritage which provide the basis for our national wealth and well-being. We have a sacred responsibility to manage them wisely.

"This 46th Annual North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference comes at a time when we are working to devise new approaches to achieving these vital conservation goals in the face of necessary fiscal self-discipline. Our country will be relying upon you and your colleagues to help us carry out the planned, orderly and scientific management of our wonderful wildlife resources as economically and as efficiently as possible.

"In your theme, "Resources Management for the Eighties," I perceive a dedication to a new beginning. May you have a most productive conference and every success in your conservation endeavors which lie ahead."

#