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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT AT PINCHOT  
INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION STUDIES,  
MILFORD, PENNSYLVANIA, SEPTEMBER  
24, 1963

I begin today a journey to save America's natural heritage -- a journey to preserve the past and protect the future. And there is no more fitting place to begin that journey than the home of America's foremost conservation family -- the Pinchots. James Pinchot was an early leader of the American Forestry Association, and his son Amos was an officer of the National Conservation Association. The most prominent member of the family, of course, was the oldest of James Pinchot's three children, Gifford Pinchot, whose career was best summed up by his own statement upon the 40th anniversary of the Forest Service he had helped to found. "I have been a Governor now and then", he said; "but I have been a forester all the time . . . and shall be to my dying day". But Gifford Pinchot was more than a forester -- more than the father of American conservation. He was a practical idealist -- believing that the riches of the American continent should produce for all its people an abundant life -- believing that waste of our resources, or their monopolistic control, was an offense which threatened the very existence of democratic society.

Pinchot's idealism was practical because it was disciplined. He viewed the American scene through the analytical eye of the trained scientist. His career, in fact, marked the beginning of a professional approach to the management of our nation's resources.

Above all, he was a gifted, driving administrator, transforming a minor Federal bureau into a dynamic, purposeful agent of national policy. He could select and inspire outstanding subordinates, persuade his superiors and demolish his critics. He was an articulate publicist and a tutor of Presidents. In the space of a few short years, he made conservation an accepted virtue in the nation's conscience.

But Pinchot's contribution will be lost if we honor him only in memory. It is far more fitting and proper that we dedicate this Institute as a living memorial. By its very nature, it looks to the future instead of the past. It is committed to meeting the changing needs of a changing era.

For our industrial economy and urbanization are pressing against the limits of our most fundamental needs: pure water to drink, fresh air to breathe, open space to enjoy, and abundant sources of energy to release man from menial toil.

Today's conservation movement must therefore embrace disciplines scarcely known to its prophets of the past. It must marshal our vast technological capacity on behalf of our vast resource supplies. It must concern itself with the secrets of nuclear energy as well as Pinchot's silviculture, with the physics and chemistry of water purification as well as Roosevelt's TVA, with the economic and engineering factors of open space planning as well as the preservation of scenic treasures.

Government must provide a national policy framework for this new conservation emphasis. But government at any level needs sound information, objective research and study. It is this function which the Pinchot Institute can serve most effectively.

The American people are not by nature selfish and wasteful. They are not unappreciative of the heritage of the past and their obligation to the future. But without guidance and information, without leadership and inspiration, without the qualities provided by Pinchot in his day which this Institute can provide in our time, mistakes will be made -- mistakes which can never be undone.

Today we often wonder how so many of our great forests could have been leveled with no thought to their restoration -- why such a small proportion of our shore area has been preserved for public use -- how it is that so many of our urban centers have been developed without parks and play areas -- why so many of our rivers are dangerously polluted -- the air breathed by millions of Americans is too impure for good health -- or the erosion of our land was permitted to reach the point where elaborate and expensive flood control devices were required to prevent great destruction.

Fortunately there is evidence that this nation, once alerted, can take constructive actions -- actions for which our grandchildren and their grandchildren will be even more grateful than we. Many of our great rivers have been converted from killers and spoilers into allies and servants -- by dams serving all the varied purposes of flood control, navigation, irrigation, recreation, power, and municipal and industrial water supply. We have local, state and national parks, although not in adequate numbers. We know how to increase the productivity of farmland, how to reclaim worn out land, how to keep the soil from blowing or washing away. We have programs for purifying water and air, for protecting and preserving fish and wildlife, for conserving helium, for developing improved methods of extracting minerals from the ground and the oceans. Trees are harvested and replanted on sensible long-term plans, not only by public agencies but by private companies and landowners.

These and other activities demonstrate beyond doubt that the principles of Gifford Pinchot have won universal acceptance. The dispute is no longer one of principles or goals -- it is now merely a question of pace and means. And no one maintains that the obligation to use our resources efficiently and thoughtfully depends solely on the Federal Government. Nor is conservation merely the job of the park ranger or the forest ranger, the soil conservationist or the game warden. Conservation is the job of us all.

It is not always the other fellow who pollutes the stream; it is not always the other fellow who litters the highways. The careless conduct of a single individual in a forest can destroy in one day the product of centuries. A comparatively few heedless hunters, ignoring game laws and regulations, can virtually wipe out a unique species of wildlife. Private commercial establishments will initially determine whether the land they own or lease will be left scarred and abused -- whether rivers and streams that pass their property will be polluted. Local and state governments can influence the use of resources by zoning requirements -- by laws against destructive practices -- and by budgetary decisions affecting the preservation of these assets.

But the role played by the Federal Government is a key one. Its attitude, effort, legislation and example all influence the national pattern. The competition for the Federal budget dollar is keen -- and properly so. Budget-makers, in choosing among worthwhile competing programs and projects, must in essence establish national priorities; and in such a competition, resource development frequently suffers from the fact that its benefits are largely prospective.

But in the field of resources, opportunities delayed are frequently opportunities lost -- and those that are not lost are certainly more costly to achieve. With the principles of Pinchot clearly in mind, this Administration began in 1961 to increase the pace of resource development and conservation in a variety of ways.

First, total national investment by the last Congress in the conservation of our water resources reached an all time high -- more than 2-1/2 billion dollars; and among the nine new reclamation projects approved were the Fryingpan-Arkansas and the San Juan-Navajo Indian projects -- the first time in history that Congress has ever authorized in one session two projects in excess of \$100 million each.

Second, three National Seashores were created -- Cape Cod on the Atlantic, Point Reyes on the Pacific, and Padre Island on the Gulf -- representing the first major additions to our coast-to-coast National Park system in 16 years -- more seashore parks, in fact, than all those previously authorized in history. Other parks and recreation areas are being added -- and their parks, I hope, will soon include the Tocks Island National Recreation Area on the Delaware River, the largest Federal recreation area in the east.

Third, steam from the Hanford Atomic Reactor, instead of being wasted, will now be used to produce power equivalent to the output of two Bonneville Dams.

Fourth, a full scale attack on water pollution has been mounted under the 1961 amendments to the Water Pollution Control Act, with an effort in 1963 three times that of 1959.

Fifth, the saline water program to find cheaper means of converting salt water to fresh water was given new impetus by new legislation; and three demonstration plants have begun operation, with two more under construction.

Sixth, our urban areas have been aided in the acquisition of open space for park, recreation and other purposes under the provisions of the Housing Act of 1961.

Seventh, the standards by which Federal water projects are evaluated were completely revised and improved.

Eighth, studies have been initiated under a new nationwide program to provide the States and local governments with information on regulating the use of flood plains and minimizing flood losses.

Ninth, new regulations now permit sufficient land to be acquired in constructing Federally-financed reservoirs to preserve their recreational potential.

Tenth, a Federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation was created; and Administration-sponsored legislation to provide financing for acquisition of National Parks and Forests is pending in the Congress, as is much needed legislation to preserve and establish our natural Wilderness Areas.

Eleventh, a major national effort to preserve our rapidly vanishing migratory water fowl includes enactment of the Wetlands Acquisition Act of 1961, which will help establish eleven new water fowl refuges under a seven-year self-financing program.

Finally, to cite a number of items, a 10-year development program for the National Forests is underway to make these key public properties contribute in full measure to the public benefit. A broad Rural Areas Development program is based on soil conservation principles and is developing new recreational areas. An Accelerated Public Works program is constructing needed local projects for the protection and preservation of natural resources. An air pollution control program -- which needs to be greatly expanded and reinforced -- is directed against this growing menace to health and urban living. Legislation discouraging the presence of billboards along our interstate highways has been renewed. And presently pending before the Congress is an Administration proposal to authorize comprehensive river basin planning, which will enable projects to be scheduled throughout entire river basins on a rational, orderly basis, not only by the Federal Government but by state and local agencies as well.

All this and more has been done or will be done; and I hope to see this week many of the projects which are now underway. But this is still small in comparison with what could be done. Today we have millions of idle acres in America -- millions of acres in need of reforestation, millions of acres of range in need of renewal, millions of miles of streams to be saved from siltation and pollution, thousands of miles of highway defaced with litter.

At the same time, we have millions of idle youth, who need work to absorb their talents, their skills, and their energies. This Nation cannot afford either idle acres or idle youth; and our proposed bill for Youth Conservation can merge these forces of idleness into forces of constructive power.

This Nation is now rising to the challenge of exploring the vast universe of space. That is as it should be -- for we cannot afford to ignore that challenge. But neither can we afford to neglect the universe here below. For it may be that whole new universes are yet to be discovered in the grains of the earth and in the depths of the ocean -- new universes equal in value and adventure to any that may exist in distant stars.

Gifford Pinchot once said: "A Nation deprived of liberty may win it; a Nation divided may reunite; but a Nation whose national resources are destroyed must inevitably pay the penalty of poverty, degradation, and decay... Conservation... is the key to the future."

Those words are more true today than when they were first uttered by the man whose memory we salute. Conversation is the key to the future, and I believe our future can be bright. If we can continue and expand the programs we have begun -- if all of us at every level can meet our responsibilities -- if we can gain new insight and foresight from the Pinchot Institute and similar centers of learning -- then we can write for our land a record of accomplishment and high purpose unparalleled in the history of the world -- a record of saving and using this Nation's supply of natural resources to assure a fuller, richer life for all Americans now and for generations to come.