CONSERVATION AND POLITICS

I was pleased to be invited to participate in the meeting here in Anchorage of the Association of State Foresters. The non-federal public segment of America's resource managers has no more capable and responsible representative than this association.

In a way, I undertook special preparation for this appearance. Week before last I was one of the fortunate participants in the well-known Idaho Land Board Tour, in my own State. Under the able leadership of the veteran head of the Clearwater Timber Protective Association, Mayor Bert Curtis of Orofino, more than a hundred men from every sector of public and private life concerned with resource management floated the North Fork of the Clearwater River on rafts.

Roger Guernsey, our State Forester, Hardy Glascock, my colleague on this program, and others well known to you, participated in a seminar on land use in a beautiful setting of this great White Pine area. The Corps of Engineers is building a flood control, hydroelectric, and log navigation facility, the Bruces Eddy Dam, and their officials were there. The U. S. Forest Service joined with Interior, and the commercial land owners and with county tax officials to discuss the management of the area to accommodate to this project. Our legislature was there in numbers, and many of our constitutional officers. Private and public recreation interests and organizations contributed, and the protection of the game and fish resource was a matter of common concern.

A comparable experience in Alaska followed. Yesterday and the day before, Alaska's Director of Natural Resources, Phil Holdsworth, its State Lands Director, Roscoe Bell, and its Attorney General, George Hayes, have conferred on Alaska's special problems with the federal government in carrying out its land selection with me, with the State BLM Director, and with the Indian Bureau's Area Director.

The point I make is that of such experiences -- which get down to specific cases in the actual physical environment involved -- comes understanding, accommodation, and inspiration for good conservation.

Eighteen months ago I spoke to your colleagues of the Washington, D. C. chapter of the Society of American Foresters on the subject of "political forestry." I carried it off well enough, I guess, because I chose to talk in my terms -- emphasizing the political rather than the forestry.
I'm going to try again today, to expose a few thoughts on the subject of "Conservation and Politics." Perhaps it would be better to call it the politics of conservation, for I have no intention of dealing with conventional or partisan politics.

We're in Alaska. Those of you whose forest resources have developed through the public domain route--from grants of public land in your Statehood Acts--cannot fail to make comparisons of the early experiences in your State with those presently being experienced here.

For example, I doubt that any state admitted up to 1912 got the running start of professionalism in its forest and land program which Alaska is demonstrating to you, so soon after admission.

But a good land law and a professional staff of unexcelled ability does not remove the conservation task from the workings of politics, internal or external. The very essence of political significance of conservation issues is concentrated here. Alaska, sparsely populated and disciplined by a rigorous climate, is rich in land area and resources but short on the capital and industrial capacity to exploit its inestimable natural wealth. In my earlier discussion of "political forestry" one of the examples I used was the policy issue of exporting round logs to Japan. How do we weigh the economic, social, international relations and other factors involved in that highly political question? Harvesting mature timber is surely conservation in the most lofty sense and Alaska is not even fractionally close to meeting that goal. Japan offers an almost inexhaustible market--if delivered in round log form. Export might tend to lure Japan away from Soviet supplies. But to do so would deprive some Alaskans of jobs, which are already scarce, because existing Japanese-financed mills would close. Moreover, such a policy would be at the expense of Pacific Northwest exports of finished lumber.

This is an aspect of conservation issues in politics. A decade or a generation or even a century ago, the same elemental conflicts of values were presented. Conservation is a philosophy of resource management. But so is economic development of a region or state. Depending on a number of variables, the two need not be in conflict. But the degree to which the partisans of one or the other attitude stakes out a claim to exclusive virtue--to that extent political temperatures rise.

Even experienced and sophisticated veterans of public resource management react in a conditioned way to the verbal stimuli which are a part of our political tradition. A few sentences ago I used the word "exploit" in reference to Alaska's economic development needs. I used it consciously and purposefully. No one jumped up to object. But you might have. This is a bad word in conservation lexicon--not for any etymological or philological reason, for words are neutral. But this one exudes the colorful symbolism of our political environment. "Exploit" means "spoil"; "conserve" means "save". In this context, one doesn't even need to write down the moral propositions that create the differences. Generations of holy crusade have produced the glandular reaction--"exploiter," evil; "conservationist," virtuous.

This Pavlovian reference has no other purpose than to illustrate how deeply conservation issues have cut into national thinking. So some will say: "Isn't
this good? Shouldn't people react righteously without having to ponder? Let's not equivocate with evil!" Of course, all of this begs the question, for it assumes that the labels and catch-phrases, the campaign slogans, have been correctly assigned; that there is some divine guidance, some intuitive gift, that permits ready identification of an infidel or heathen cause. For the purist, there are no gradations of virtue--no compromises between ideal and reality.

But beyond this intellectual exercise of defining and sorting "good guys" and "bad guys," there is a very great danger that past habits of oversimplification may lead us into serious error. Many in this room will participate in making the social decisions that must be made to meet the demands of 300 million people for living space, food and fiber, and all of the other resource requirements of an almost unimaginable technology. Conservation and resources promise to become the most critical domestic political issue as we approach that social milestone. Any attempt to answer the challenge with cliches must fail--and with it our basic values, quite possibly our whole political system and our existence as a democratic society.

You may well protest that these examples of conservation symbolism are so utterly crude as not to be taken seriously in this age of sophisticated communication. If so, I fear that you have not had the dubious pleasure of being caught between range users who want fences to hold their cattle and hunters who decry any interference with the free migration of deer or antelope. Or the contending views of those who insist that spraying is critical if thousands of acres of timber are to be saved, matched against the dire warnings of geologists concerning malathion's effect on essential animal life.

But we need not stop with such crude examples. Professional conservationists have many sophisticated phrases. The appeal of "sustained yield" has been sufficient to turn many a tide. And "multiple use" comes close to being the universal solution to all demands, even though it provides no effective assistance in adjudicating incompatible demands. The mere suggestion of "give away" is enough to stop any resource transaction in its tracks--at least temporarily. Such slogans are high-powered weapons of the political arsenal.

They are the current manifestations of a long tradition. Resource issues have been political issues since the earliest days of the republic. Jefferson and Hamilton's ideological struggle had as one of its ingredients the policies which should govern in settling western lands. The "Mississippi Bubble" was the major political issue of its decade. John Wesley Powell made the settlement of arid lands a bloody battleground long before those lands had any real value. Of Theodore Roosevelt and Pinchot I shall speak in a moment--but in their wake came Teapot Dome and the New Deal's major political assets--CCC, TVA, Soil Conservation, Bankhead-Jones and a dozen others that you can name without my help. In the last decade, Al Serena held center stage while the pressures for more open space, better recreation facilities, more and purer water piled up. This accumulation is our political inheritance, the unfinished agenda of our generation.

The techniques of achieving political goals for conservation have never been more effectively exhibited than they were at the hands of the first Roosevelt
and his chief lieutenant, Gifford Pinchot. Roosevelt accomplished with a stroke of the pen what his predecessors had declined to do out of timidity or lack of interest or both. He made his name synonymous with conservation and he met both the "interests" and their legislative spokesmen head-on.

He set aside public lands for forest purposes while enrolled enactments of Congress prohibiting such executive action sat out the constitutional waiting period on his desk. Forestry, reclamation and wildlife protection became main functions of the Federal Government under his tutelage. He convened the first White House conference on conservation--the next President to do so was John F. Kennedy in 1962.

Roosevelt took the conservation movement out of the polite conversation of drawing rooms and off the platforms of the lecture circuit. An ideal, clothed with Victorian respectability, became an objective of public policy--of government activity. Conservation was made an object of political contest--where it has been ever since, not only at the Federal level but in the states as well.

Pinchot presents an even more interesting case study in the development of political conservation and conservation politics, which is equally significant. Pinchot is something of a rarity among all public figures: a pioneer in an emerging profession and respected for that in itself; masterful politician, good enough to quarterback many of Roosevelt's most daring forays, and to be elected Governor of Pennsylvania twice; but above all, superlative bureaucrat. With a singleness of purpose that would have been disastrous in one of lesser ideals, Pinchot used a small and ineffectual office in the Department of Agriculture as the nucleus for concentrating most of the Federal Forestry activities into one of the largest and most powerful of all Federal bureaus--one that could dominate cabinet officers and challenge a President of the United States.

Pinchot's zeal to become the dictator of conservation values and morals led, of course, to his split with Taft and his accusations against Secretary of the Interior Richard K. Ballinger, whom Taft appointed to replace Pinchot's friend and collaborator, James Garfield. The congressional hearings (on an Alaska coal land withdrawal, as it happened) marked one of the bitterest episodes in the history of conservation politics. The stakes were high--the office of the President becoming eventually involved. Ballinger was eventually exonerated of any intentional wrong-doing, but it was found that certain of the evidence submitted in his behalf had been misrepresented as to time of preparation. Press and public alike remembered only this tarnishing fact--Ballinger was publicly guilty, though innocent.

This incident in one man's bureaucratic war on those who opposed him did lasting harm to a major conservation Department of the Government. Pinchot--although out of office--never lost an opportunity to remind the country of Interior's faults, as if Ballinger had been found guilty. Not until Harold Ickes took over a quarter century later did the Department retrieve the public respect so necessary to discharge its conservation mission.
My discussion to this point has covered conservation and politics in a general or abstract sense—the insertion of conservation issues into partisan programs. And I have tried to emphasize the tremendous part played by the politics of bureaucratic contest. If we are to see the whole picture the politics of the conservation movement itself must be considered, too. By this I do not mean the internal manipulation of organizations, but the interplay of powerful forces among those who have a rightful claim to be called conservationists.

Theodore Roosevelt's task in establishing the conservation ideal was difficult because it ran across the grain of traditional thinking. He had to first establish waste as something close to immoral—and then work on the public conscience to see that it reacted accordingly. The substantive issues of his day were, however, relatively uncomplicated. Techniques of forest protection were direct, elementary and easily comprehended; power generation and transmission had potential for the future, but comparatively little current relevance; demands upon land and water resources were confined to single uses, uncomplicated by competing needs incompatible with each other.

Now our population has almost doubled and its mobility multiplied five- or tenfold. A disturbing percentage of our land area must be devoted to concrete ribbons strung with the beads of metropolis, suburb and town. Technology has made possible and created forms of land use which were impossible a half century or even a decade ago. The protective barriers to the wilderness have been breached. The alternatives of 1900 were black and white; conservation or exploitation, public or private development; friends and foes were readily labeled by the choices they made. The conservation movement was a homogeneous gathering of the like-minded and the high-minded. Their specific interests might differ—from wildlife to scenic grandeur to power potential—but their central objectives were consistent.

William Howard Taft had hardly vacated the White House, however, before the first clatter of discord disturbed this paradise of righteous contentment. Hetch Hetchy gave warning that one conservationist's ideal could be another's desecration—that the recriminations among friends under stress could match those that drew blood from sworn enemies.

As the cities of central California and the Bay Area grew they rapidly outstripped readily available supplies of water; a similar situation in power could be foreseen due to their great distance from conventional energy sources. To those who were thoroughly steeped in Theodore Roosevelt's premise that "conservation is the great fundamental basis for national efficiency," it was elemental that the rivers of the Sierras should be harnessed to provide the water and power requirements for a growing prosperity. From almost every standpoint of economy, efficiency and engineering convenience, the ideal site for dam construction was in the Hetch Hetchy Valley of the Tuolumne River. Heated opposition immediately developed from two quarters; from private utility interests, because the project was to be constructed and operated by the City of San Francisco, and from an important segment of the conservation movement itself, because the site was deep in the Yosemite National Park, almost consecrated in the eyes of parks purists.
Hetch Hetchy became a national issue primarily because of its public power aspects. But the contention between conservation values was also very much in the public eye. Labels became mixed and the identity of friend and foe became complicated. If you can conceive of it, John Muir was actually cast in the role of advocate for Pacific Gas and Electric Company, a mouthpiece of "the interests". To those who recount this story from the public power viewpoint, the term "conservationist" is reserved for Hetch Hetchy's proponents—all others fall in the category of "nature lovers" or "power interests". In this, the first clear instance of conflict among national conservation objectives, the charge was also made by one element of the conservation front that their erstwhile friends were being exploited by those having diametrically opposite social values. "Save Yosemite from Destruction" was a rallying cry of the purist school among dedicated conservationists; it was equally available to those who would use every possible device to defeat the reservation of any further lands for park purposes.

This incident was more than a temporary symbol. Hetch Hetchy has returned periodically to haunt successive generations of conservation supporters. When the dam was finished some 20 years later, the city instituted a program of operation which included sale of power for distribution through a private utility. This had been a major issue in 1913 and the legislation specified a wholly public enterprise. Secretary Ickes intervened and enforced the basic conditions through a departmental decision and a later lawsuit. As late as 1961, our Department had to grapple with the sensitive issues of how to correlate improvements in the efficiency of water and power operations with preservation of park values.

Any number of parallel situations may be cited to demonstrate the increasing conflict between and among interests within the conservation family in its broad expanse. The Steamboat Springs project, dear to the hearts of the reclamation branch of the family, foundered upon the unavoidable consequence of flooding a part of Dinosaur National Monument. The Glen Canyon reservoir is already beginning to fill, but the bitterness over failure to protect Rainbow Bridge against water intrusion is readily evident in our daily mail. Issues such as these find their outlet in the exercise of those highly developed techniques of political pressure which the conservation enthusiasts developed to carry their cause.

Even after projects are in operation for many years with harmony between multiple uses, a conflict of interest can develop through changed conditions. Moisture deficiencies in the northern Rockies sometimes reduce the waters available to Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park. These waters are committed to irrigation subscribers to an extent which may draw the lake surface down abnormally. The majority of the park scenery is dependent in part upon the lake reflections. Mud flats destroy this value in addition to the damage done to nearly all forms of water recreation. At this point, practically all of the conservation interests—boaters, fish and wildlife enthusiasts, casual tourists and hikers—make demands for relief which are impossible to satisfy in the face of commitments which cannot be modified.

The issues upon which the conservation community finds itself divided will increase as demands for scarce land increase. Concerted efforts to preserve the remaining wilderness are slowed by the friction between "total preservation" and "wise use" as the guiding principle in conservation philosophy. Unless this
dichotomy is reconciled, the eventual winner can only be the interests which want neither preservation nor controlled use of forest and mineral resources. Even more partisan in its nature is the growing tendency toward differences between sport hunting and fishing and other recreational land uses. The states' rights strategy which Pinchot and Roosevelt scouted in their day is inherent in this situation since the states have primary jurisdiction over fish and game regulation. A wedge driven between state and national interests on this ground could penalize the progress of an entire generation toward complementary and supplemental effort.

The political dimension of conservation has therefore expanded in ever-widening circles as our society and our technology have become increasingly complex. The simple "for" or "against" issue of 1900 now has overtones of the bureaucratic contest for policy supremacy. "Multiple use" becomes a slogan to block the preservation of critically needed recreation values; freedom to locate mineral claims argues against inclusion of a public domain tract in either a forest or a park. Parks supporters are accused of "locking up" resources because they regard public hunting incompatible with park objectives. The pluralism of modern life makes extremely complicated the simple faith which motivated Thoreau, Muir, Powell and the other prophets of the good life.

Let us now look to the future prospects for conservation as a political issue. Will it drop out of the field because other problems of modern life demand all of our attention? I am convinced that the exact opposite will be the case. Science and technology can change and multiply and stretch the limits of such resources as food and fiber and energy sources. But eventually we get back to the fundamental elements of land and water. Living space for twice our present population will demonstrate the inelasticity of the land surface. Water problems, both qualitative and quantitative, must be attacked promptly and with every scrap of our imagination--for wars have been fought and civilizations have died for its lack. We face a century of intense competition for these elemental resources. Government must inevitably enter as the arbiter. Conservation issues may therefore become the dominant ones in public affairs, therefore in politics, in our own generation.

The essence of what I have been saying is portrayed rather uniquely in a single edition of your professional journal--the July issue of American Forests. Its prominently displayed editorial announces the calling of the Fifth American Forest Congress to map out the conservation job ahead. That editorial is dominated by an historical account of AFA's justifiably proud history of past influence on conservation policies--and in practically every instance progress is measured by success in the political arena. Then turn, if you will, to the colorful insert which sets forth the draft platform which will serve as the core of the Congress' deliberations. Like the past, AFA leadership projects future objectives in political terms: direct attack on problems of land use, water conservation, outdoor recreation policies, control of mining and other activities which have a potential for resource deterioration--even an intrusion into the highly political field of tax policy as it relates to resource conservation.

One could not ask for a more political document--and a masterful one which contains something for everyone, couched in language most favorably calculated to elicit the desired reaction. Yet the task set forth is a realistic and a critically important one. I only hope that what I have had to say here will be useful to you in your contributions to that Congress--in recalling my prediction that conservation in politics will be a major factor in the job ahead.