I am delighted that your National Convention this year is in Oregon. You have a very active State organization here in Oregon and your local groups are active and vocal. I hope tonight to discuss constructively a national issue. I have picked my subject, and this platform, for presenting my views with the feeling that both are particularly appropriate.

The subject I have chosen may seem regional or local in its implication. Certainly I hope it will be a familiar one to the Oregon Izaak Walton League and its constituent chapters, particularly those in Eastern Oregon. Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that the management by the Federal Government of the public lands in the West is a matter of concern to all of the people of the United States and of interest to a truly national body such as yours.

Walter Prescott Webb, a distinguished and sometimes acerbic historian, said a few years ago that the overriding influence that shapes the West is the desert. The desert, he said,

"has stripped the mountains of their vegetation, making them 'rocky'; it has dried up the inland seas, leaving Death Valley completely dry and Lake Bonneville a briny fragment in Great Salt Lake. It is the great designer of the American West, painting the landscape with color, chiseling the mesas and pinnacles, building the plains with soil washed down by perishing rivers such as the Platte and Canadian. It shortened the grass on its borders before destroying it in the interior. It never permitted trees on the plains it built, and where it found them it beat them down to sage and brush, reducing the leaves to thorns and the sap to grease and oil. The trees it could not destroy it shriveled, and those it could not shrivel it petrified."

Today I want to talk about Federal stewardship of land in the States which Webb calls the desert States--the 47% which Uncle Sam owns in the eight desert and three Pacific States.

This Federal land--coveted as it is in this land-hungry era--is a residue. It was left over after the colonizing surges, and of all the land in the desert States generally it is the most desert-like. Where water can be brought to the soil, the land has largely passed into private ownership.

The two principal land managing agencies of the Federal Government are the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. Although 70 million acres of Federal land in the eleven Western States are timbered and Interior manages some of it, about 6/7ths of it is under Forest Service management. However, in a general way I want to confine my remarks today to that part of the so-called
public domain which is chiefly valuable for grazing. Most of this land is under Interior dominion, but some of what I will say will apply to the lands chiefly valuable for grazing which are in national forest areas. These millions of acres have grass, minerals, and natural wonders. By and large, they lack abundant water.

Absence of water marks and controls the management of this part of Federal land. As the great cities on the rim of the desert reach farther and yet farther for the water to keep themselves alive, these public lands must nurture and hold the scant water that falls as rain. For the rains may come as torrents in a day, and vegetation is what holds the water from ripping away the soil to sediment the reservoirs, or from rushing destructively to erase the works of men.

Purity of water—quality of water—becomes of more and more importance as the wells are dug deeper and deeper.

The objective of our stewardship in essence is the conservation of the soil and the moisture. We are concerned with both ecology and hydrology. At a recent conference of my Department's leading technicians concerned with soil and moisture conservation work, the scientist from the United States Geological Survey gave me a term I would like to use as a theme—arid land hydrology.

Deplorable is the word for the state of our stewardship of the desert public lands. In sum, our arid land hydrology—our work with the soil and the moisture—is deficient.

One deficiency is bureaucratic. We've been unable to put together reliable data and statistics from among the myriad bureaus and agencies of the Federal Government which have a responsibility for management of Federal land—five bureaus in the Interior Department alone. With this initial warning, let me give you highlights of a report recently furnished me on the status of Federal stewardship within Interior:

Two hundred million acres need conservation treatment. At our 1961 rate of accomplishment, we need 42 years effort in brush control, 20 years effort in contouring; we need to seed 19 million acres, an area equal to the size of five of the New England States; and we ought to build over 900,000 check dams. Some of our deficiencies are translated into 90 years or so backlog of work.

Our statisticians tell us we need to spend over a half-billion dollars in capital improvements, over $200 million on surveys and evaluations, a hundred million on operation and maintenance—for a total of about $850 million to do work for which we budgeted $16 million in 1963.

To talk of 60 or 70 years backlog of work or to talk the need for a half a billion dollars capital improvements is simply not meaningful to the average citizen. Range managers classify range, using relative terms such as excellent, good, fair and poor. These terms have meaning mainly to the initiated, but a concept which can be understood by all is another measure of our stewardship. That is the trend in condition. Is the range getting better, staying the same, or getting worse? A shocking report which recently reached my desk shows that
only one-fifth of our range is in an upward trend; that is, shows improvement in vegetation and soil stability between given years. All of the rest of it is either static or is in a downward trend.

A pilot study conducted at the request of the Appropriations Committee of the Senate by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture working jointly in areas in each of three States (Oregon, Colorado and Montana) emphasizes another doleful fact. The poorer the condition of the range, the more likely it is to be in a downward trend, and the curve steepens.

All of these statistics are from time to time questioned. In any given grazing district, you will find disagreement between those who seek the use of the range and those who would restrict or ration its use. But overall we find little quarrel with the conclusion that we need to do a great deal more of soil and conservation work on our land than seems practical of accomplishment under our current procedures, authorizations and appropriations.

I am reminded a little of the TV debate in one of those perennially recurring fluoridation fights. The opponents spent most of their time arguing over whether a person would have to consume at one sitting, in order to get a dangerous dosage of fluorides, a bathtub full of water or just half a bathtub full.

Whether the job of rehabilitating our range is equivalent to drinking a bathtub of water or half a bathtub--whether our backlog is 20 years or 60 years--may be valuable to know. But we already know we have to get started.

As President Kennedy said when he was inaugurated, we aren't going to get our program accomplished in 100 days or 100 weeks, but "let us begin."

Whether we have to consume a bathtub of water or half a bathtub, let us try to figure out ways to take it a quart at a time.

Before going further, it may be worthwhile for me to catalog some of the reasons for the existence of this deplorable condition of our range lands. Without indicating my judgment as to relative importance, I would ask you to consider these things:

(a) This Nation began as a thinly populated strip of the East coast. For the first 100 years or so, the lands managed themselves--man did not move upon them in such numbers or with such destructiveness as to cause real damage. Even in the 1870's when Interior Secretary Carl Schurz decried the activities of the loggers taking Federal timber without contract or payment, the grasslands were regarded as inexhaustible and free for the taking. As a country we have only comparatively recently come to see the necessity for planning; for management according to agreed upon standards. Standards of good practice have been largely academic, and remedial measures have been applied on the squeaky-wheel theory--uncoordinated, insufficient, oblivious to science, and too late. This is the carelessness of apparent plenty, the unconcern of seeming inexhaustibility. Teeming Japan and crowded Europe had to manage, but not us.
Furthermore, our laws traditionally have emphasized disposition as the predominating management objective. They still reflect the philosophy that lands are to be had by the public—to pass to private ownership at nominal or no cost. The Homestead Law, the Desert Land Entry Act, Pittman Act, and a myriad of since repealed laws, such as the Timber and Stone Act and the Timber Culture Act. It was under the latter that 11 million acres of the Midwest passed into private ownership. Citizens could and did acquire this land on their promise to plant ten acres of timber and care for it for a decade, as a condition of acquiring title to 160 acres—and I doubt that a cord of wood has inured to the Government in the performance of this promise.

The Bureau of Land Management was formed from the joinder of the General Land Office with the United States Grazing Service in 1946, a century and a third after the General Land Office was created. The General Land Office was one hundred and twelve years old before the Grazing Service was established.

In 1934, the Congress, aware that the public range had fallen into deplorable condition, passed a great conservation measure, the Taylor Grazing Act. Under this Act, which sought to ameliorate the chaos of the livestock industry dependent on the public land by some of the same techniques then being tried out for ameliorating the chaos in the rest of the business community under the NRA blue eagle codes, a scheme of management was brought to the public domain grazing lands. By Executive Orders millions of acres were withdrawn and placed into grazing districts. A priority system was authorized whereby owners of private land who had a history of using the public range in connection with their private land for the base period, and who had hay and other forage for caring for the livestock when they could not graze the public lands.

Order was restored to the range, and a great deal of progress has been made in correcting the deficiencies which existed in 1934 on some of the ranges. On others, we are not materially better off now than we were then. The soil is too fragile, the water too deficient, the damage too far advanced. Furthermore, we have not yet succeeded in completing the adjudication process whereby public range is divided into allotments among those entitled to use it.

When the Taylor Grazing Act was passed, according to the debate recorded at the time, the anticipation was that fees for the use of the range would enable improvements to be made. We now collect from 30,000 permittees in the 16 grazing districts about $3 million a year. A quarter of this is earmarked for range improvement work. This represents only a fraction of the cost of administration and is insignificant when measured against the size of the job to be done.

Yet it would be misleading to conclude that significant economic advantages to the operators arise out of operation on the public range, as compared with private range. The low level of grazing fees, particularly in grazing districts, is offset.

For example, we projected a hypothetical ranch operation in Eastern Oregon, based on averages extracted from a recent study of range and ranch economics and probably typical of hundreds of others. Use of BLM range accounted for 42% of
his forage; his capital investment was $30,000; the gross annual income from sale
of livestock $14,000; interest $3900; depreciation $3300, and after operating
costs, including grazing fees of just $346, his net was only $644, or $58 a month.
Obviously his family is fed from interest on his investment, assuming it is paid
for, and his depreciation. His investment, at least the value of the home ranch
for purchase or sale purposes, in substantial part represents an allocation of
the value of Taylor Act grazing privileges. If he is better off than a rancher
using private forage only, the cattle business is even worse off than it claims.
He is not getting rich on cheap grazing fees. Indeed, any increase in the grazing
fees would tend to deflate the value of the ranch, and for Uncle Sam abruptly to
attempt to collect for public forage at private forage rates would squeeze this
man and hundreds of ranchers out of business.

(e) The Taylor Act makes grazing subordinate to other uses of public land
by providing for the classification of public land determined to be more valuable
or suitable for uses other than grazing. If an area is classified as suitable
for homestead or desert land entry, grazing privileges may be cancelled without
compensation. The risk of this kind of loss, and loss of privileges incident to
exchanges and withdrawals for park or other purposes, tends to discourage the
making of permanent improvements by grazing permittees. Millions of acres
formerly in range have been withdrawn for military purposes. There have been
extensive developments on range lands for oil and gas leasing, incidentally a
much more fruitful source of revenue for the Federal government than grazing--
it is fortunate that these uses are generally compatible.

(f) The Government and adjacent private owners and sometimes one Government
landlord agency and an adjacent different Government agency are not always the
best of neighbors. Lack of neighborliness militates against good management
practices. Good fences, the poet Frost says, make good neighbors. He wasn't
thinking of some of the range land in Wyoming. And if a good fence makes a good
neighbor, it doesn't necessarily follow that a padlocked gate or a barred entry
makes a better neighbor.

This has particular application to joint use of the public land by game and
fowl, and by the public generally seeking various kind of recreational pursuits.
Recreation is coming to be more and more a recognized and measurable economic
value in the application of treatment and other improvements of the land. Some-
times this leads to good management and sometimes it defeats good management.

The national convention of the Izaak Walton League is not likely to be much
edified by this recital of our present situation and some of the reasons for its
existence. More often than not, it is you and your spokesmen--statesmen like Joe
Penfold--who are telling us these things. Your leaders know of the stewardship
deficits of which I speak; they understand the historical and political reasons
for their existence; and they are sensitive to the fact that it is a public
responsibility and not just a government responsibility to devise workable ways
of reducing these deficits.

We completed in Washington a week or so ago a White House conference on
conservation. The President inspired us as he said that this administration
wanted to be identified as a conservation administration. I hope the terms
"conservation" and "conservationist" do not become devalued.
There was a time when conservation controversies could be neatly classified—the good guys against the bad guys, the conservationists versus the destructionists. This is no longer true. As in the newer types of TV westerns, you have to look twice to identify the villain or the hero, and having done so, you are never sure you are right. I have attended lumbering, mining, oil and gas, trade association, and many another type of meeting, including meetings of many groups like yours. All these audiences have accepted the salutation "fellow conservationists" as entirely appropriate. Furthermore, each of these groups can document a claim to be called "conservationist."

I am glad to enlist them all in the President's scope of the term. I am glad to admit that in the task of managing the public lands, we need them all.

So long as the policy of our laws allows the citizens to acquire title to minerals, to use the public range for grazing, to purchase Government timber in order to keep privately owned sawmills operating—in a word, while commercial interests have status on the public land—it is far more in our interest as managers to reach an accommodation with them than it is to decry their activities, to castigate this generation for the sins of the last, or to impugn motives as selfish or destructionist.

I think it possible for the condition of our public range lands to be improved under the existing framework of the laws. People deriving a benefit from their use—the cattlemen, the hunters and fishermen, the recreationists, and rock hounds and bird watchers, the miners and the lumbermen and the oilmen—all will react patriotically to realistic and sensible proposals which hold promise of effecting improvements. Furthermore, I think they will agree that the cost can be equitably borne among them and the general taxpayers.

I spoke at the outset of arid land hydrology. We ought, it seems to me, to be able to improve the condition of our public grazing land by adapting the approach we use for hydrologic projects in the more conventional sense. The task of improving a particular area is equivalent to a "dry land reclamation project."

It seems to me that an analysis of why we have been successful in managing and improving the great river systems of this country, both reclamation projects and flood control projects, will disclose many techniques and much comparability constructive to us in a new approach to arid land hydrology. These come to my mind:

(1) Project approach—However much we may know about the total needs for the development of our rivers, we still recognize that we get the Congress to authorize them on a project by project basis. Over time we have achieved a balance between the intrinsics of engineering and the extrinsics of political possibility to enable us to show progress, decade by decade, in controlling the rivers and in bringing water to the irrigable desert; in building great power grids and in devising schemes for financing and repaying the investment. We know that to ask Congress for too much is to get nothing, and we know that the judgment of what is the right amount and what is the right time represents political virtuosity. Look around you while you are here in Oregon and in our neighboring State of Washington.
and you will see great monuments to political virtuosity—Bonneville, the Dalles, McNary, Ice Harbor, Detroit, Owyhee, Grand Coulee—the list is a list of the development of the West.

(2) Cost-benefit ratio—In water projects, the magic formula is the cost-benefit ratio. When our engineers compute benefits to exceed cost, our elected law makers will not only authorize a project but can also choose the better or the best among competing projects. Why can’t we apply this technique to our problems with improving our deteriorated grazing land?

(3) Engineering and scientific studies and reports—The massive review reports of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers bring together the engineering, economic, social, and scientific data which bear upon various alternatives for the development of a given stream system. As in the case of the rivers, our arid land embraces widely differing problem areas, each of which must be treated as a unit, balancing physical treatments, economic adjustments, land tenure, and planned usage against the physical limitations of the area. These data must be gathered and correlated, and on a strictly scientific basis. It is important to identify what we don’t know and what we do know, whether on passing anadromous fish over dams, or how much water we are losing to worthless plants and whether that water can be salvaged. At the present, we simply do not know the best ways to do some of the things that should be done. We don’t know how to control gullying because we have only a hazy idea of the mechanics of the process. We must study the hydrologic characteristics of streams, for these control their ability to carry silt and sand.

Paradoxically on a worldwide basis we have far more data on humid lands than on the arid areas. Theoretically the latter are the more important. We have no complete idea of the total amounts of underground water nor of the rates of flow and total volume of many of the streams and other water sources significant to the proper development of rangelands.

(4) Local cooperation—It is an exaggeration, but perhaps with a kernel of truth, to say that some really outlandish water projects can be authorized if there is solid local support for them. When I returned to Boise at the close of World War II, the Corps of Engineers was building a flood control dam, Lucky Peak. Since the Boise River was already controlled by Arrow Rock and the Anderson Ranch Dam, I inquired as to why Lucky Peak. One cynic said that it was because the Morrison-Knudsen Company, having just been cancelled out of so much of its wartime work, needed to keep its engineers and equipment busy. Whatever the reason, the people of the town and our delegation in Congress were for it, nobody was against it, and who had the temerity to question it.

The Bureau of Reclamation knows the efficacy of having a proposed reservoir fully contracted for by the water users before a dollar is appropriated. I have the feeling that similar contractual arrangements could be made to finance some needed range improvements, if the users could get equivalent contract protection. A considerably stepped-up rate of local cooperative work on the public land could be accomplished if we had equivalent legislative authority. Congress certainly would feel more kindly toward long-term improvements if there were a broader local base of participation.
Credit must be given to two Oregonians that I am able to report to you that this new approach, which I have outlined for you on an abstract or hypothetical basis, can also be discussed in specific terms. Congressmen Al Ullman of Oregon's Second District and his colleague in the Senate, Senator Wayne Morse, about a year ago furnished the impetus for what has come to be called the "Vale Project". They brought together cattlemen using the range, representatives of your own and other organizations interested in wildlife use of the range, and other community and business leaders, in eastern Oregon. There in an extensive tour they examined firsthand the deplorable conditions typifying some of the worst of what I have mentioned today existing in the Vale District.

They urged a fresh approach to the problem of rehabilitating the Vale Grazing District, while taking into account the social, economic, and legal implications involved.

This particular District has almost all of the problems of aridity. In size it is very large, with 6½ million acres within its exterior boundaries, of which only 1½ million is owned by private, State or other non-Federal owners.

Organized ranching has been carried on in the District since the late 1860's and probably no other area in the West today so closely resembles its appearance of 100 years ago. In the early years there was a heavy demand for horses, and huge herds ran wild. Some of their descendants still run wild in the canyons and inaccessible mountainous areas. The Taylor Grazing Act brought a measure of control to what had become by 1934 mainly a sheep area. Ranger livestock is still the major economic support of the District with 232 individuals licensed to graze 89,000 cattle and 40,000 sheep.

Interior Department officials agreed to catalog the needs of the District and come up with a program for meeting them on a project basis. They found that heavy grazing and repeated fires had reduced range productivity, and it appeared that drastic reductions would have to be effected in the licensed number of cattle and sheep. This, it was recognized, would result in tremendous economic losses, not only for the individual rancher but for the entire economy of the area.

The project approach resulted in a report which proposed an acceleration of investment in resource development and rehabilitation, and intensification of management practices. These practices would include seeding, brush eradication, erosion control structures, seasonal use of fences and water developments.

More intensive management of the livestock by the private owners and cooperation of the users was a key element. It was estimated that benefits to the range users would be an extra 500,000 animal unit months of grazing use for a seven year period and 37½ million pounds of beef above the current production levels.

Particular attention was paid to the recreation potential including scenic attractions, water recreation interests, wildlife, historical markers, and geological attractions. The need for opening the area to the public by means of roads and the development of public use and sites for camping, picnicking, and so forth was recognized with 55 such intensive-use sites planned.
Existing scientific knowledge in such matters as browse revegetation, site adaptations, and seeding techniques were brought to bear upon improvement of the lands, not only for commercial use but for deer winter ranges.

The Department's archives are filled with plans for improvement of the range. The Vale Project is different in several important respects:

Among these are:

(a) Local people including both the wildlife and the commercial users were brought early into the planning; after the plan was devised, the grazing district advisory board, with its wildlife representative, held a three-day meeting in Washington to consider the plan, and make action recommendations.

(b) The data gathered was related to the local economic situation, not only on a ranch by ranch basis but generally.

(c) There was a follow-through by the elected representatives demanding action on the part of both the Legislative and Executive Branches of the Government.

This last point should be emphasized. Historically, of course, Oregon has been well represented in the Congress on conservation issues. Charles McNary, a Republican Senator, was recognized by President Roosevelt as a great conservationist. It was he who placed the O&C lands on a multiple use, sustained yield basis. It is no accident that a Democratic Administration allowed his name to be memorialized by a great structure, McNary Dam. Dick Neuberger, a Democratic Senator, has his memory memorialized in the new Winema National Forest. His great work is being carried on by an equally fine conservationist, his widow and successor in the Senate, Maurine Neuberger.

Her senior colleague, Senator Wayne Morse, year after year has fought successfully for more funds for improvement of the range. I would like to mention particularly the now established policy of providing for immediate reseeding of burned over rangelands.

The Vale Project is not yet out of the woods, but the efforts of Senator Morse and Congressman Ullman have given nationwide meaning to the term Vale Project, with emphasis on the word "project". Their intercession resulted in a supplemental request to the Congress from the President of the United States to add two million dollars to the Interior Department appropriation bill to begin to implement the Vale Project, and for the same approach in other Western States. The Senate has concurred, by a roll call vote, and this matter will now be considered in the conference on the bill between the Senate and the House. I am hopeful that we can get the Conference Committee to recognize the project approach.

But whether we succeed or not in this particular Congress, I think we have taken the first steps on a new road, which promises improvements in the management of our rangelands.

I have discussed with you today on a rather technical basis the subject of improvement of our rangelands. I appreciate your attention, and the concurrence you have indicated by this attention in my idea that this is a national problem worthy of national attention.

x x x