President Johnson's historic message to the Congress on natural beauty last February excited sympathetic reverberations which surprised many a jaded government administrator and Congressman. By focusing his attention on the need for restoring and protecting the beauty of this Nation, the President put into words a deeply felt need; these words got through to the American people. The reaction tended to prove that the American people are deeply responsive to the call for a high sensitivity about the quality of our total environment.

They expect that words will now be translated into action by all levels of government and by private citizens and organizations.

There is a temptation to catalog the problems faced by the Nation—from neon signs and billboards cluttering the highways to the raw devastation of abandoned strip mines. From the drab sameness of too many suburban developments and the dismal squalor of poverty to the increasing piling up even in areas of primitive wilderness, where a few years ago man came rarely, if at all. From the ugliness of poverty that slanders human dignity, both blighting our cities and scarring the beauty of our rural landscape, to the millions of tons of debris that are the castoffs of our affluence. From junkyards of old autos to the reclamation of old surface mines.

The catalog has been done by others, though, and much of it is no further away than the drive you will take home tonight or to your work tomorrow morning.

The goal set by the President was double barreled. One is trained on the traditional goals of conservation—to protect our countryside and preserve it from destruction. This goal has heightened significance today while the urbanization of the Nation and the creeping sprawl of megalopolis eats up a million acres a year. As the President noted, a modern highway may wipe out the equivalent of a fifty-acre park with every mile. There is a depressing
sterility about the unusable greensward covering acre upon acre of land caught within the loops and cloverleafs of our modern superhighways.

The job of saving from destruction both the natural beauty of our landscape, and preserving from destruction man-made structures of historic or aesthetic value have been full-time concerns of the conservationist from many years. The work of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, chartered by Congress in 1949, and the Federal Registry of National Historic Landmarks are making important contributions.

But it sometimes takes swift and decisive action to save areas about to be swept under urban and highway expansion. On one recent occasion Secretary Udall took the leadership that saved one of Frank Lloyd Wright's early houses from the path of a superhighway near Washington, D. C. Though there were some who thought it would have been better to destroy the house rather than move it out of the setting for which Wright designed it, the Pope House is now being re-erected on a site hopefully immune to highways and developments.

The President's program for a more beautiful America includes several major items within these classic dimensions, one of the most important and exciting of which is a proposed national system of wild rivers--preserving in their natural, free-flowing state a few of the great rivers that have given people such pleasures and inspiration. A dozen new national parks and recreation areas would help meet the need for added space for recreation.

But there was another side to the President's program--a second barrel--that is new. The President has turned the attention of the country toward cleaning up the messes we have already made, restoring the beauty we have trampled, making our cities and countryside beautiful again. He called this "a creative conservation of restoration and innovation" concerned "not with nature alone, but with the total relation between man and the world around him. Its object is not just man's welfare but the dignity of man's spirit."

President Johnson has given us a formidable task, one to strain the inventive power of all who join the effort. The really difficult job will now come in translating the President's goals into specific actions at the Federal, local, and private level.

The statement of the President to the Congress has in it the excitement of Executive proclamation. But the work of shaping the words of the President in legislative terms and ultimately translating the laws of the Congress into program and results are also rewarding--and difficult and worthy--tasks of public service.

It is this process that is the province of politicians and bureaucrats, of business managers and boards of directors, anywhere in the governmental and nongovernmental structure of our society that decisions are made about how something will be done, who will do it, and when.

Does this then suggest that conservation--including President Johnson's New Conservation--is a political issue? It is usually not possible to stamp conservation issues with a partisan political label, although every two years
the effort is made to squeeze some of the issues into a partisan mold.

More often conservation controversies are relegated to a good guys v. bad guys type of analysis. In the international field we are all aware of the attempt to manipulate public attitudes with reference to some other country's policy--what they want, we oppose, and vice versa. In the conservation field, it works the same way. If the lumber or cattle or mining people want a particular law or policy, then to some other groups it must be bad; if the Sierra Club or the Wilderness Society or some other public group agrees, however reluctantly, to a particular bill or policy, then the other guys can be counted on to oppose it.

A related or refined version of this is the "epithet" method of political confrontation.

Even experienced and sophisticated veterans of public resource management and conservation react in a conditioned way to verbal stimuli which are part of our political tradition. Take the word "exploit" in reference to economic development needs. This is ordinarily a bad word in the conservation lexicon—not for any etymological or philological reason, for words 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 have to write down the moral propositions that create the differences. Generations of holy crusade have produced the glandular reaction--exploiter, evil; conservation, virtue.

This Pavlovian reference illustrates how deeply conservation issues have cut into national thinking. An understanding of the weight which even the words have in stimulating attitudes is essential to anyone embarking on the waters of conservation activism.

There is real danger, though, in assuming that conservation issues really involve only black and white. To frame conservation controversies in terms of "public interest" is to beg the question.

In the more than four years that I have been in the Department of the Interior, first as Assistant Secretary for Public Land Management, and now as Under Secretary, I cannot recall any one of the innumerable controversies where each side of the issue wasn't framed plausibly in terms of the public interest. I have known no decision made by Secretary Udall which hasn't been made in the interest of the public. Yet the controversies have been deep and virgrous, and many have reverberated in the halls of Congress and in the public press long after the decisions were made. In all of them, both sides of the controversy are stated in terms of the public interest, and in most of them both sides are in the public interest. But choices have to be made. Often extremely close and difficult choices.

One of the major conservation projects called for by President Johnson will serve as an example of the kind and dimension of the issues now involved and that must be faced in the future.
It is the program for the Potomac River to make it serve as a conservation model for the rest of the Nation. The program is to be comprehensive, covering the Potomac River itself—clean it up and keep it clean—to the development of recreation areas to serve the expanding population of the National Capital area, which by the year 2000 will probably top 7 million. The program also calls for preservation of the natural beauty of the region, and completion of the scenic George Washington Memorial Parkway along the Virginia and Maryland shores of the River.

Secretary Udall has set up a Federal Task Force on the Potomac, including representatives of Federal agencies involved in the planning effort. In addition, the Secretary has called upon hundreds of citizens and citizen groups, both public and private, to lend their wisdom and energies to the planning task. The response has been almost overwhelming. In fact, it is difficult now to see how all of the interests and jurisdictions involved in this interstate river basin can be orchestrated into the planning process.

Though it is too early to know yet how all these efforts will come out, the controversy in which the project begins is fully enough to satisfy those looking for a battle.

The Potomac River Basin has many features about it that challenge the new kind of planning effort now being undertaken. Covering some 14,700 square miles near the center of the eastern seaboard, the Potomac shares problems common to every major river basin in the United States. As a largely undeveloped river, it is a river of opportunity. With the exception of Washington, D.C., the towns and cities along its banks are of moderate size.

Can we state the Potomac's problems in terms of alternatives, and thus facilitate the resolution of all the incipient conflicts which are evident?

I am of the opinion that much of our river basin planning—in fact resource planning in general—has been partially off base in the past. Even before the present planning effort began there was a storm of public controversy over the basin study and report issued in 1963 by the Army Corps of Engineers. Though there is relatively little controversy about what the Corps had in its plan relating to the Upper Basin and the Potomac tributaries, a proposed mainstem dam at Seneca has proved to be extremely controversial. The dam would flood part of the existing C&O Canal National Historical Park—a ribbon of parkland that stretches from Washington to Cumberland.

The Corps published its report on its extensive studies on the feasibility of the project for review by the public and by its superiors. In the debate which has followed, some see the alternative as one between Seneca Dam and the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

Almost everyone would recognize this as an unsatisfactory over-simplification. You can't choose between a dam and a park, without knowing whether or how you can meet the needs for flood control, municipal water supply, etc., which the plans for the dam were designed to meet in some other way.
An equally unsatisfactory statement of alternatives is presented on the choice between a comprehensive plan, and no plan at all.

The real issue is whether you have alternatives to the dam to meet the needs, as above, and whether (since presumably the alternatives would be more expensive, given our predisposition for favorable cost-benefit ratios) we care to spend the money which would be involved in selecting the alternative.

This issue is suggested by dissenting Commissioner Ross in the Consolidated Edison case. One can't be against developing new electric capacity; but one might insist that the choices presented to the Federal Power Commission, and presumably also to the public, should include the choice of burying the utility wires, or of getting power from Labrador or some other place.

It is not possible to put a dam and a park on a giant balance and thereby obtain some weighing of values.

The kinds of values, as I've said, that go into considering the need for a major dam include, among others, water supply and quality, flood control, pollution abatement, and reservoir fishing and water sports. The latter two values serve more people, probably, but is that a valid reason to opt for the dam over the Canal? This states a further refinement of our problem—recreation values themselves are not always quantifiable.

If the school board covets park land for a new school building, those who oppose the action may not necessarily be against education.

If the highway department prefers a straight road which bisects a natural area of beauty, are the opponents against transportation?

If it can be shown that more people will use a reservoir for boating and water skiing than will use the Historical Park it floods out for hiking or looking, are those who seek to save the park snobbish and undemocratic?

The questions are foolish, thus stated. But too often, it is in this form that the policy makers of government have to deal with the public pressures.

How much better it would be if the choices could be identified much earlier in point of time, and if the choices could be honest ones, ones which would be subject to the application of value judgments worthy of a matured society.

To take an extreme case, the official who decides to go ahead to build the superhighway to the boundary of the wildlife refuge or natural area has made the real decision, even though that particular official may be completely insulated from the social and political pressures—which are central to our system of free government. The duly elected officials who are faced with the responsibility for the waste involved in abandonment of the completed section have in fact no choice at all.

As to the democracy in recreation statistics, would not these questions be better ones: are there alternative opportunities for the water recreation? Is there another C&O Canal National Historical Park?
Conservation issues are public issues. Success in the task of conservation requires mastery of the workings of politics, both internal and external. Conservation presents elemental conflicts of values.

If the politics of conservation are to be worthy, if it is to be recognized that resource managers must communicate to the public and to the legislatures a sense of ethical urgency rooted in a felt philosophy, then history must be studied, our society comprehended, our governmental system mastered.

Slogans are not substitutes for cerebration; and the field of conservation isn't open to be staked out as the exclusive domain of any group, however well intentioned.

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 resource requirements of a technology that seems to want to outrace itself. 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 will fail, and with it our basic values and quite possibly our whole political system and our existence as a democratic society.

The issues of the New Conservation will be controversial. There will not be agreement—even within a single branch of the government—about whether one course of action should be taken or another.

The challenge, then, must be framed in the operational dimension of the politics of action. You, cannot and should not expect universal agreement on these issues even among yourselves.

There is tremendous opportunity, it seems to me, in the challenge given to us by the President. For the first time in history the President has set before the Nation a goal of beauty and excellence for our whole environment. Those laboring in the conservation vineyards now work in the shadow of a national goal articulated with sweeping scope. The mantle of conservation has been wrapped around programs to reclaim our cities and rescue our countryside.

The challenge has been stated. It is up to the citizens to pick up the challenge and transform it into action. In the words of President Johnson:

"... a beautiful America will require effort of government at every level, of business, and of private groups. Above all it will require the concern and action of individual citizens, alert to danger, determined to improve the quality of their surroundings, resisting blight, demanding and building beauty for themselves and their children."

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