

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

For Release on Delivery 3:00 P.M. (EDT), September 23, 1976

REMARKS OF SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR THOMAS S. KLEPPE
BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES
DEARBORN, MICHIGAN, SEPTEMBER 23, 1976

When the United States celebrated its Centennial in 1876, land was so plentiful that we were giving it away. Our natural resources seemed inexhaustible. If we had a wildlife problem, it appeared the problem was overabundance.

Because we had an abundance, there was little incentive to manage our resources. We seemed to have a credit card by which the bill never came due.

During the past century we enjoyed the benefits of this abundance. We skimmed the best off the top of our natural resources.

But now we have received the bill.

Land has become an extremely expensive commodity.

We have learned that our resources are finite.

And we find that wildlife preservation requires positive action.

In short, we no longer can enjoy the luxury of letting nature take its course. All of our resources, and especially our wildlife resources, must be carefully managed.

At the Federal level, it is the Interior Department which bears the responsibility of wildlife management. But there is no way that our Department alone could do an adequate job for the 540 million acres of Interior-managed public lands.

We need the help and cooperation of the States.

A solid program for cooperative State-Federal wildlife management was worked out in 1970.

This policy encourages maximum cooperation between Federal and State employees who are carrying out their respective roles on Federal lands.

The division of responsibility has worked very well, and it remains the policy of the Department.

Some State officials have expressed concern that our division of responsibility has been changed as a result of the Supreme Court ruling on the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

That ruling by unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court held that the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act is constitutional. There is little to discuss about that issue other than to say we should all help to implement the Act and to obtain needed amendments to make it workable.

Basically, the decision stated that Congress has the authority, under the Constitution, to regulate and protect the wildlife on Federal public lands, State laws notwithstanding. So the question is not whether Congress can delegate wildlife functions to Federal agencies, but whether it should.

To address the wildlife issue per se, let me state that it is not our intent to ask Congress for any legislation that would in anyway provide authority for Federal regulation of wildlife species on the public lands. The States have and will continue to set hunting, fishing, and trapping laws and regulations which apply on those lands, except as modified by Federal legislation.

Where we can legally do so, we have sought to turn wildlife management programs over to the States. For example, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 provides for cooperative agreements between the Department and State agencies to administer endangered species programs. Recently we signed 11 such agreements with States, providing them with about \$2 million in Federal funds to carry out the program.

One of the finest examples of State cooperation comes in carrying out the national migratory bird program. We have fewer than 200 Federal special agents in the field, but thanks to help from several thousand State law enforcement officers we process an average of 6,500 Migratory Bird Treaty Act violations each year.

States provide us with vital information in carrying out our studies for regulation-setting, and State universities are giving us valuable help through their research programs.

As I have said time and again, we want to work with the States to achieve our mutual goal of sound wildlife management. We will carry out the letter and spirit of the law where Congress has mandated that we see that certain standards are met, but we would prefer to see the State agencies administer laws and programs where they can do so effectively.

It's not that we seek to diminish the Federal involvement in wildlife preservation and environmental protection.

Quite the contrary.

President Ford's Bicentennial Land Heritage Program is a monumental commitment to improve wildlife habitat and management.

This is a 10-year, \$1.5 billion program to expand our national parks and wildlife refuges, to develop new areas and improve those currently in the system, and to provide the staff necessary to administer the areas properly.

Here is what President Ford proposes for the National Wildlife Refuges:

-- He would provide \$31 million for accelerated acquisition of 111,000 acres of unique and valuable wildlife habitat.

-- He would provide \$200 million for improvements, facilities construction and habitat development.

-- He would provide almost \$65 million for upgrading both existing and new refuges.

-- He would provide \$70 million--\$7 million each year--so that we could increase the staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by 500.

By doing this we would:

-- Prevent the loss of important wildlife habitat.

-- Assure important ecosystems are protected.

-- Make the National Wildlife Refuge System more available to the American people so they can enjoy and learn from this natural treasure.

In the past two decades the National Wildlife Refuge system has doubled in size and public visitation has quadrupled to 30 million per year.

Staffing has not increased during the past 10 years.

Facilities have deteriorated.

We have not been able to give the refuge areas the protection they require.

The primary purpose of the refuges is to provide undisturbed, natural areas where wildlife--including endangered species--can exist and propagate so that we can maintain a healthy balance in the ecology. And public use of refuges without proper facilities and adequate staff too often results in damage to the wildlife and habitat we are attempting to protect.

It is especially important that refuges near metropolitan areas have facilities to help people learn about nature and enjoy the spectacle of wildlife in a natural setting.

President Ford's program calls for the immediate appropriation of the \$1.5 billion to be certain that the program is carried through over the next decade. This would assure us of achieving our objectives.

This is to be spent over and above the previously projected expenditures of the park and refuge systems.

The Fish and Wildlife Service would continue to make annual purchases utilizing the Migratory Bird Conservation Account and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This would not be affected.

The remainder of President Ford's program is for enlargement and improvement of parks.

There is:

-- \$110 million for acquisition of almost 200,000 acres of private land in recently authorized park areas.

-- \$500 million for development of new and existing parklands.

- \$194 million for upgrading of current parks.
- \$130 million to add 1,000 park service personnel.
- \$200 million to upgrade urban parks.

All of these expenditures will serve the cause of wildlife preservation and enhancement of our natural heritage.

We need this program to catch up and move ahead in our parks and refuge programs. During the past decade the emphasis has been on acquiring land. Now the emphasis should be on developing what we have so that it can serve the needs of the people for recreation and the needs of wildlife for protection.

During the past year, with the earlier political crisis weathered, with the war in Vietnam behind us, with economic conditions steadily improving, we have seen the President steadily increase the amount of Federal resources channelled toward parks and refuges. For example, he gave us 400 additional park positions in time for the Bicentennial crush.

He involved himself personally in formulating the Bicentennial Land Heritage Program--and he personally leveled some of the possible roadblocks to this program.

In proposing the program August 29 at Yellowstone National Park, President Ford said "we must act now to prevent the loss of treasures that can never be replaced for ourselves, our children and for future generations of Americans."

At the outset of my remarks I mentioned that the apparent abundance of America in 1876 blinded most people to the need for resource conservation.

But there were a few perceptive individuals, such as those who a few years earlier had come up with the concept of national parks. They managed to get Yellowstone designated as the first national park, in America and in the world.

I believe that President Ford in the program he announced last month has added another historic chapter to the conservation and resource management movement which had its seeds in Yellowstone.

It is my hope that you who are influential spokesmen for wildlife preservation and outdoor recreation will help get the necessary Congressional action and will work with us to implement the program.

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INT: 7017-76