

## REPORT OF THE NATIONAL CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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The duty of man to man, on which the integrity of nations must rest, is no higher than the duty of each generation to the next; and the obligation of the nation to each actual citizen is no more sacred than the obligation to the citizen to be, who, in turn, must bear the nation's duties and responsibilities.

In this country, blessed with natural resources in unsurpassed profusion, the sense of responsibility to the future has been slow to awaken. Beginning without appreciation of the measure or the value of natural resources other than land with water for commercial uses, our forefathers pushed into the wilderness and, through a spirit of enterprise which is the glory of the nation, developed other great resources. Forests were cleared away as obstacles to the use of the land; iron and coal were discovered and developed, though for years their presence added nothing to the price of the land; and through the use of native woods and metals and fuels, manufacturing grew beyond all precedent, and the country became a power among the nations of the world.

Gradually the timber growing on the ground and the iron and coal within the ground came to have a market value and were bought and sold as sources of wealth. Meanwhile, vast holdings of these resources were acquired by those of greater foresight than their neighbors before it was generally realized that they possessed value in themselves; and in this way large interests, assuming monopolistic proportions, grew up, with greater enrichment to their holders than the world had seen before, and with the motive of immediate profit, with no concern for the future or thought of the permanent benefit of country and people, a wasteful and profligate use of the resources began and has continued.

The waters, at first recognized only as aids to commerce in supplying transportation routes, were largely neglected. In time this neglect began to be noticed, and along with it the destruction and approaching exhaustion of the forests. This, in turn, directed attention to the rapid depletion of the coal and iron deposits and the misuse of the land.

The public conscience became awakened. Seeing the increased value and noting the destructive consumption and waste of the natural resources, men began to realize that the permanent welfare of the country as well as the prosperity of their offspring were at stake.

The newly awakened sense of duty found expression in a call by the President upon the governors of the States to meet him in conference, and in the declaration of this conference at its sessions in

the White House in May, 1908. The action of the conference led to the appointment of the National Conservation Commission, with authority to collect information and cooperate with similar commissions appointed by the States in the great work of conserving the natural resources of the country.

In the growth of the country and gradual development of the natural resources there have been three noteworthy stages. The first stage was that of individual enterprise for personal and family benefit. It led to the conquest of the wilderness.

The next stage was that of collective enterprise, either for the benefit of communities or for the profit of individuals forming the communities. It led to the development of cities and States, and too often to the growth of great monopolies.

The third stage is the one we are now entering. Within it the enterprise is collective and largely cooperative, and should be directed toward the larger benefit of communities, States, and the people generally.

In the first stage the resources received little thought. In the second they were wastefully used. In the stage which we are entering wise and beneficial uses are essential, and the checking of waste is absolutely demanded.

Although the natural resources are interrelated they are unlike, and each class requires distinct treatment. The land is a fixed quantity which can not be materially increased, though its productivity and availability for the uses of man may be greatly augmented; the forests are variable in quantity and may be destroyed by fire, waste, and improvident use, or protected and improved in such way as to meet human necessities. Together the lands and the forests are improvable resources.

The minerals are limited in quantity and can not be increased or improved by anything which man may do. They are expendable resources.

The fresh waters are limited in quantity, though the supply is permanent. They form a naturally renewable resource which man may do nothing to increase, but may do much in the way of conservation and better utilization.

The treatment applied to each class should be adapted to its own fullest development and best utilization and to those of the other classes of resources.

The wastes which most urgently require checking vary widely in character and amount. The most reprehensible waste is that of destruction, as in forest fires, uncontrolled flow of gas and oil, soil wash, and abandonment of coal in the mines. This is attributable, for the most part, to ignorance, indifference, or false notions of economy, to rectify which is the business of the people collectively.

Nearly as reprehensible is the waste arising from misuse, as in the consumption of fuel in furnaces and engines of low efficiency, the loss of water in floods, the employment of ill-adapted structural materials, the growing of ill-chosen crops, and the perpetuation of inferior stocks of plants and animals, all of which may be remedied.

Reprehensible in less degree is the waste arising from nonuse. Since the utilization of any one resource is necessarily progressive and dependent on social and industrial conditions and the concurrent development of other resources, nonuse is sometimes unavoidable.

It becomes reprehensible when it affects the common welfare and entails future injury. Then, it should be rectified in the general interest.

For the prevention of waste the most effective means will be found in the increase and diffusion of knowledge, from which is sure to result an aroused public sentiment demanding prevention. The people have the matter in their own hands. They may prevent or limit the destruction of resources and restrain misuse through the enactment and enforcement of appropriate state and federal laws.

At every stage in the growth of our country, strong men grew stronger through the exercise of nation building, and their intelligence and patriotism grew with their strength. The spirit and vigor of our people are the chief glory of the republic. Yet even as we have neglected our natural resources, so have we been thoughtless of life and health. Too long have we overlooked that grandest of our resources, human life. Natural resources are of no avail without men and women to develop them, and only a strong and sound citizenship can make a nation permanently great. We can not too soon enter on the duty of conserving our chief source of strength by the prevention of disease and the prolongation of life.

Wastes reduced and resources saved are the first but not the last object of conservation. The material resources have an additional value when their preservation adds to the beauty and habitability of the land. Ours is a pleasant land in which to dwell. To increase its beauty and augment its fitness can not but multiply our pleasure in it and strengthen the bonds of our attachment.

In the conservation of all the resources of the country the interest of the present and all future generations is concerned, and in this great work—involving the welfare of the citizen, the family, the community, the state, and the nation—our dual system of government, state and federal, should be brought into harmonious cooperation and collaboration.