started the era of wilderness conservation. The results will give us abundant reasons for gratitude as long as we have sense enough to preserve them. But wilderness conservation did little to prepare us either to understand or to oppose the general mayhem of the all-outdoors that the industrial revolution has finally imposed upon us.

Wilderness conservation, we can now see, is specialized conservation. Its specialization is memorialized, in the Sierra Club's slogan, in the word "scenic." A scene is a place "as seen by a viewer." It is a "view." The appreciator of a place perceived as scenic is merely its observer, by implication both different and distant or detached from it. The connoisseur of the scenic has thus placed strict limitations both upon the sort of place he is interested in and upon his relation to it.

But even if the slogan were made to read "... to explore, enjoy, and protect the nation's resources . . . ," the most critical concern would still be left out. For while conservationists are exploring, enjoying, and protecting the nation's resources, they are also *using* them. They are drawing their lives from the nation's resources, scenic and unscenic. If the resolve to explore, enjoy, and protect does not create a moral energy that will define and enforce responsible use, then organized conservation will prove ultimately futile. And this, again, will be a failure of character.

Although responsible use may be defined, advocated, and to some extent required by organizations, it cannot be implemented or enacted by them. It cannot be effectively enforced by them. The use of the world is finally a personal matter, and the world can be preserved in health only by the forbearance and care of a multitude of persons. That is, the possibility of the world's health will have to be defined in the characters of persons as clearly and as urgently as the possibility of personal "success" is now so defined. Organizations may promote this sort of forbearance and care, but they cannot provide it.

The Ecological Crisis as a Crisis of Agriculture

One reason that an organization cannot properly enact our relationship to the world is that an organization cannot define that relationship except in general terms, and no matter how general may be a person's attitude toward the world, his impact upon it must become specific and tangible at some point. Sooner or later in his behalf —whether he approves or understands or not—a strip-miner's bulldozer tears into a mountainside, a stand of trees is clear-cut, a gully washes through a cornfield.

The conservation movement has never resolved this dilemma. It has never faced it. Until very recently—until pollution and strip-mining became critical issues—conservationists divided the country into that land which they wished to preserve and enjoy (the wilderness areas) and that which they consigned to use by *other* people. With the increase of pollution and mining, their interest has become two-branched, to include, along with the pristine, the critically abused. At present the issue of *use* is still in its beginning.

Because of this, the mentality of conservation is divided, and disaster is implicit in its division. It is divided between its intentional protection of some places and some aspects of "the environment" and its inadvertent destruction of others. It is variously either vacation-oriented or crisis-oriented. For the most part, it is not yet sensitive to

the impact of daily living upon the sources of daily life. The typical present-day conservationist will fight to preserve what he enjoys; he will fight whatever directly threatens his health; he will oppose any ecological violence large or dramatic enough to attract his attention. But he has not yet worried much about the impact of his own livelihood, habits, pleasures, or appetites. He has not, in short, addressed himself to the problem of use. He does not have a definition of his relationship to the world that is sufficiently elaborate and exact.

The problem is well defined in a letter I received from David Budbill of Wolcott, Vermont:

"What I've noticed around here with the militant ecology people (don't get me wrong, I, like you, consider myself one of them) is a syndrome I call the Terrarium View of the World: nature always at a distance, under glass.

"Down-country people come up here, buy a 30-acre meadow, then when you ask them what they plan to *do* with it, they look at you like you're some kind of war criminal and say, 'Why, nothing! We want to leave it *just* the way it is!' They think they're protecting the environment, even though they've forgotten, or never knew, that nature abhors a vacuum . . . and in a couple of years their meadow is full of hardhack and berries and young gray birch and red maple. Pretty soon they can't even walk through the brush it's so thick. They treat the land like any other possession, object, they own, set it aside, watch it, passively, not wanting to, nay! thinking it abhorrent to engage in a living relationship with it. . . .

"Another thing folks like this do is buy land and immediately post it (to protect the animals, or their investment, I guess) then go back home. . . . The old guy or the young guy who has always hunted deer on that piece is mad. The excuse for posting (protection) is a thinly disguised cover for the real notion which has to do with the possessive, capitalist ideas about property. I'm not opposed to private property, like it even, but the folks I'm talking about, in their posting, violate . . . a strong local tradition of free trespass. There are disadvantages to free trespass, abuses, we've suffered them, but what's good about it is it understands something about use and sharing. The upper-class eco-folks lack this understanding . . .

". . . we always, with our neighbor, pick apples in the fall off trees on a down-country owner's land. There is a feeling we have the *right* to do that, a feeling that the sin is not trespass, the sin is letting the apples go to waste.

"What I'm trying to get at is that in the environmental movement there are some ugly, elitist, class-struggle type things operating. The best example of this around here is the controversy over trailers. The Audubon types (I'm a member of Audubon) are fighting . . . terribly hard to zone trailers out of areas like this, put them in trailer parks or eliminate them altogether. Well, a trailer is the only living space a working man around here can afford. And if he, say, inherits 3 acres from a parent and wants to put a trailer on it, the eco-folks would like to say no, which is a dandy way to ghettoize the poor. There are so many elements of class struggle lying under the attitudes of a lot of environmentalists; it's scary. . . . Their view of the natural world is so delicate and precious, terrarium-like, picture-windowish. I know nature is precious and delicate. I also know it is incredibly tough and resilient, has unbelievable power to respond to and flourish with kindly use.

". . . I don't care about the landscape if I am to be excluded from it. Why should I? In Audubon magazine almost always the beautiful pictures are without man; the ugly ones with him. Such self hatred! I keep wanting to write to them and say, 'Look! my name is David Budbill and I belong to the chain of being too, as a participant not an observer (nature is not television!) and the question isn't to use or not to use but rather *how* to use.' "

The conservationist congratulates himself, on the one hand, for his awareness of the severity of human influence on the natural world. On the other hand, in his own contact with that world, he can think of nothing but to efface himself—to leave it *just* the way it is.

This is an important issue, and I want to be careful not to oversimplify it. What has to be acknowledged at the outset is that wilderness conservation is important and that it has its place in any conservation program, just as the wilderness has its place in human memory and culture. It seems likely to me that the concern for wilderness must stand at the apex of the conservation effort, just as it probably must stand at the apex of consciousness in any decent culture. There are several reasons for this:

1. Our biological roots as well as our cultural roots are in nature. We began in a world that was pristine, undiminished by anything we had done, and at various times in our history the unspoiled wilderness has again imposed itself, its charming and forbidding *invitation*, upon our consciousness. It is important that we should preserve this memory. We need places in reach of every community where children

can imagine the prehistoric and the beginning of history: the unknown, the trackless, the first comers.

2. If we are to be properly humble in our use of the world, we need places that we do not use at all. We need the experience of leaving something alone. We need places that we forbear to change, or influence by our presence, or impose on even by our understanding; places that we accept as influences upon us, not the other way around, that we enter with the sense, the pleasure, of having nothing to do there; places that we must enter in a kind of cultural nakedness, without comforts or tools, to submit rather than to conquer. We need what other ages would have called sacred groves. We need groves, anyhow, that we would treat as if they were sacred—in order, perhaps, to perceive their sanctity.

3. We need wilderness as a standard of civilization and as a cultural model. Only by preserving areas where nature's processes are undisturbed can we preserve an accurate sense of the impact of civilization upon its natural sources. Only if we know how the land *was* can we tell how it *is*. Records, figures, statistics will not suffice; to know, in the true sense, is to see. We must see the difference—in rates of erosion, for instance, or in soil structure or fertility—in order to keep it as small as possible. As a cultural model, the wilderness is probably indispensable. Sir Albert Howard suggests that it is when he says that farmers should pattern the maintenance of their fields after the forest floor, for the forces of growth and the forces of decay are in balance there.

But we cannot hope—for reasons practical and humane, we cannot even wish—to preserve more than a small portion of the land in wilderness. Most of it we will have to use. The conservation mentality swings from self-righteous outrage to self-deprecation because it has neglected this issue. Its self-contradictions can only be reconciled—and the conservation impulse made to function as ubiquitously and variously as it needs to—by understanding, imagining, and living out the possibility of "kindly use." Only that can dissolve the boundaries that divide people from the land and its care, which together are the source of human life. There are many kinds of land use, but the one that is most widespread and in need of consideration is that of agriculture.

For us, the possibility of kindly use is weighted with problems. In the first place, this is not ultimately an organizational or institutional solution. Institutional solutions tend to narrow and simplify as they

approach action. A large number of people can act together only by defining the point or the line on which their various interests converge. Organizations tend to move toward single objectives—a ruling, a vote, a law—and they find it relatively simple to cohere under acronyms and slogans.

But kindly use is a concept that of necessity broadens, becoming more complex and diverse, as it approaches action. The land is too various in its kinds, climates, conditions, declivities, aspects, and histories to conform to any generalized understanding or to prosper under generalized treatment. The use of land cannot be both general and kindly—just as the forms of good manners, generally applied (applied, that is, without consideration of differences), are experienced as indifference, bad manners. To treat every field, or every part of every field, with the same consideration is not farming but industry. Kindly use depends upon intimate knowledge, the most sensitive responsiveness and responsibility. As knowledge (hence, use) is generalized, essential values are destroyed. As the householder evolves into a consumer, the farm evolves into a factory—with results that are potentially calamitous for both.

The understanding of kindly use in agriculture must encompass both farm and household, for the mutuality of influence between them is profound. Once, of course, the idea of a farm included the idea of a household: an integral and major part of a farm's economy was the economy of its own household; the family that owned and worked the farm lived from it. But the farm also helped to feed other households in towns and cities. These households were dependent on the farms, but not passively so, for their dependence was limited in two ways. For one thing, the town or city household was itself often a producer of food: at one time town and city lots routinely included garden space and often included pens and buildings to accommodate milk cows, fattening hogs, and flocks of poultry. For another thing, the urban household carefully selected and prepared the food that it bought; the neighborhood shops were suppliers of kitchen raw materials to local households, of whose needs and tastes the shopkeepers had personal knowledge. The shopkeepers were under the direct influence and discipline of their customers' wants, which they had to supply honestly if they hoped to prosper. The household was therefore not merely a unit in the economy of food production; its members practiced essential productive skills. The consumers of food were also producers or processors of food, or both.

This collaboration of household and farm was never, in America, sufficiently thrifty or sufficiently careful of soil fertility. It is tempting to suppose that, given certain critical historical and cultural differences, they might have developed sufficient thrift and care. As it happened, however, the development went in the opposite direction. The collaborators purified their roles—the household became simply a house or residence, purely consumptive in its function; the farm ceased to be a place to live and a way of life and became a unit of production—and their once collaborative relationship became competitive. Between them the merchant, who had been only a supplier of raw materials, began to usurp the previous functions of both household and farm, becoming increasingly both a processor and producer. And so an enterprise that once had some susceptibility to qualitative standards—standards of personal taste and preference at one end and of good husbandry at the other—has come more and more under the influence of standards that are merely economic or quantitative. The consumer wants food to be as cheap as possible. The producer wants it to be as expensive as possible. Both want it to involve as little labor as possible. And so the standards of cheapness and convenience, which are irresistibly simplifying and therefore inevitably exploitive, have been substituted for the standard of health (of both people and land), which would enforce consideration of essential complexities.

Social fashion, delusion, and propaganda have combined to persuade the public that our agriculture is for the best of reasons the envy of the Modern World. American citizens are now ready to believe without question that it is entirely good, a grand accomplishment, that each American farmer now "feeds himself and 56 others." They are willing to hear that "96 percent of America's manpower is freed from food production"—without asking what it may have been "freed" *for*, or how many as a consequence have been "freed" from employment of any kind. The "climate of opinion" is now such that a recent assistant secretary of agriculture could condemn the principle of crop rotation without even an acknowledgment of the probable costs in soil depletion and erosion, and former Secretary of Agriculture Butz could say with approval that in 1974 "only 4 percent of all U.S. farms . . . produced almost 50 percent of all farm goods," without acknowledging the human—and, indeed, the agricultural—penalties.

What these men were praising—what such men have been praising

for so long that the praise can be uttered without thought—is a disaster that is both agricultural and cultural: the generalization of the relationship between people and land. That one American farmer can now feed himself and fifty-six other people may be, within the narrow view of the specialist, a triumph of technology; by no stretch of reason can it be considered a triumph of agriculture or of culture. It has been made possible by the substitution of energy for knowledge, of methodology for care, of technology for morality. This "accomplishment" is not primarily the work of farmers—who have been, by and large, its victims—but of a collaboration of corporations, university specialists, and government agencies. It is therefore an agricultural development not motivated by agricultural aims or disciplines, but by the ambitions of merchants, industrialists, bureaucrats, and academic careerists. We should not be surprised to find that its effect on both the farmland and the farm people has been ruinous. It has divided all land into two kinds—that which permits the use of large equipment and that which does not. And it has divided all farmers into two kinds—those who have sufficient "business sense" and managerial ability to handle the large acreages necessary to finance large machines and those who do not.

Those lands that are too steep or stony or small-featured to be farmed with big equipment are increasingly not farmed at all, but are abandoned to weeds and bushes, often with the gullies of previous bad use unrepaired. That these lands can often be made highly productive with kindly use is simply of no interest; we now have neither the small technology nor the small economics nor the available work force necessary to make use of them. What might be the importance of these "marginal" lands, and of an agricultural technology and economy appropriate to them, in light of population growth is a question that the agriculture experts apparently would be embarrassed to consider, so entranced are they by the glamor of bigness.

As for the farm families who cannot "get bigger" and therefore have to "get out," they are apparently written off as a reasonable, quite ordinary, and altogether bearable expense. Former Secretary Butz could praise the business acumen of the new big-time American farmer ("In all likelihood he knows as much about financing and business accountability as his banker"), evidently without wondering what may be the *agricultural* import or effect of such knowledge, or if somewhere there might not be an excellent farmer who is *not* more acute, in a business way, than his banker. But this is the catch

in our almost religious dependence on experts: Mr. Butz is a farm expert, and a farm expert is by definition not a farmer; he has changed sides. I have at hand fifteen speeches by Mr. Butz and his assistant secretaries, all of which praise the productivity—that is, the business success—of the American farmer, and none of which mentions any problem of land maintenance or any problem of the small farmer.

A sampling of quotations from one of these speeches—one made by former Assistant Secretary Richard E. Bell—will give the gist and the manner of official agricultural thinking:

". . . true agripower . . . generates agridollars through agricultural exports."

"True agripower is the capacity of less than 5 percent of America's population to feed itself and the remaining 95 percent with enough food left over to meet market demands of other nations and still provide food assistance for poor people throughout the world."

"Agripower should not be a political tool. Feeding people . . . is too serious a matter to be left to political manipulation."

"Once again growth in U.S. farm productivity . . . is on the rise. . . . We no longer have the acreage limitations which for so many years served to restrict grain and cotton production. . . ."

". . . the real measure [of agricultural strength] is productivity, combined with processing and marketing efficiency."

"Years ago, farm operations were highly diversified, but today, farmers are concentrating on fewer and much larger crop or livestock enterprises. Now, many one- or two-enterprise farms exist where there were formerly three to five enterprises.

"And with the spread of sophisticated machinery, farm sizes have expanded as their numbers have declined—stretching from an average 195 acres in the 1940's to about 390 in the 1970's.

"Specialization and growth are aided by the ready availability of purchased inputs and custom services."

"With additional income earned from exports, U.S. farmers are able to purchase more household appliances, farm equipment, building supplies, and other capital and consumer goods."

"Agridollars have gone a long way toward offsetting our petrodollar drain."

"Less than 5 percent . . . of all grain moving between countries goes for food assistance."

"It is evident that U.S. agripower is a major force in the world's exchange of goods and services. Agripower is, unquestionably, an even greater force than petropower in man's survival in the future. Man can and has survived without petroleum, but he cannot live without food."

And that was the official line on agriculture during the Butz years. There is nothing in it that was not representative: the self-congratulation, the confusions of purpose, the complacency, the jargon, the sprains and ruptures of sense, the ignorance or ignoring of consequence, the social and economic prejudices ritualized in progressivist clichés. And nowhere that I have seen was the official line more complicated than this, more aware of costs or inequities or conflicts or problems.

We would do well to examine these statements in more detail, for they are not just the political policies of ex-officials. They represent very well the prevalent assumptions of agricultural bureaucrats, academicians, and businessmen.

"Agripower," it will be noted, is not measured by the fertility or health of the soil, or the health, wisdom, thrift, or stewardship of the farming community. It is measured by its ability to produce a marketable surplus, which "generates agridollars." It is to be measured by "productivity, combined with processing and marketing efficiency." The income from this increased production, we are told, is spent by farmers not for soil maintenance or improvement, water conservation, or erosion control, but for "purchased inputs": "household appliances, farm equipment, building supplies, and other capital and consumer goods." I do not mean that we should necessarily begrudge the farmer these purchases; I am only noticing that, to Mr. Bell, the farmer does not prosper to become a better farmer, but to become a bigger spender. The assistant secretary was applying to farming a standard of judgment that is economic, not agricultural. Farming is defined here purely to suit the purposes of a businessman.

Mr. Bell makes the benign assertion that this "agripower" feeds people, including the poor of the world, and is therefore too important to be put to political use. But when this subject is reverted to at the

end of the speech, we find that "U.S. agripower" is a major force in world trade, a force intended to offset the "petropower" of other countries. And we have the assurance that, after all, "Less than 5 percent . . . of all grain moving between countries goes for food assistance" to the poor. (And, of course, all of this must be weighed against former Secretary Butz's avowal that "Food is a weapon.")*

Next we hear the routine self-congratulation of the department on the increase of productivity following the removal of production controls (the only agricultural problem acknowledged in any of these speeches). Our agriculture policy is now based on the principle of "full production"—an obscure notion that former Secretary Butz and his colleagues paraded before their audiences like the True Cross. As businessmen and politicians, perhaps they did not know how strenuously agricultural production must be qualified by the restraints and disciplines of soil maintenance and conservation. Perhaps they did not know what "full production" means in present practice—present technology, methods, and economic urgencies having replaced those restraints and disciplines. In practice, however, "full production" means that on farm after farm fence rows, windbreaks, and waterways have been plowed, steep slopes put under cultivation, and soil stewardship generally neglected. It means that production is being paid for, not just with labor, money, and fuel, *but with land.*

But the most remarkable and significant part of Mr. Bell's speech is the one in which he applauds the most degenerative, dangerous, costly, and socially disruptive "achievements" of American agriculture: (1) "economy of size," which means the gathering of farmland into the ownership of fewer and fewer people—not farmers necessarily but an "agribusiness elite"—and the consequent dispossession of millions of small farmers and farm families; and (2) specialization, which means the abandonment of the ancient, proven principle of agricultural diversity—agricultural stability through diversity—with its attendant principles of mixed husbandry of plants and animals and crop rotation. It is now, for the first time, deemed provident and wise to put all the eggs in one basket.

The giveaway is in the curiously pleased-sounding statement that "specialization and growth are aided by the ready availability of purchased inputs. . . ." This betrays, for one thing, how far we have

*A friend has pointed out the "incredible cheek" of calling food "agripower" and then warning against its use as "a political tool."

abandoned the old ideal that the farm should aim at economic independence; that is, it should be far more productive than consumptive, more a source than a consumer of material goods. This old ideal sought to preserve the farmer on the farm; that was of necessity its first objective. But it also sought to keep the source of food independent of any but agricultural means—an aim that ought to recommend itself, it would seem, to a fairly ordinary intelligence. Its desirability becomes altogether clear when one considers that a farm —given the *appropriate* technology, the recovery and return of organic wastes to the soil, an economy that is not exploitive, and a sufficient human work force—can achieve a high measure of economic independence.

None of this was clear to the intellectuals of the Department of Agriculture, and no doubt they were thereby saved a good deal of worry. For one of the "purchased inputs," on the "ready availability" of which our agriculture now absolutely depends, is petroleum—for which we are not only dependent on non-agricultural sources, but on other nations. That we should have an agriculture based as much on petroleum as on the soil—that we need petroleum exactly as much as we need food and must have it *before* we can eat—may seem absurd. It *is* absurd. It is nevertheless true. And it exposes the hollowness of Mr. Bell's contention that "Agripower is, unquestionably, an even greater force than petropower in man's survival in the future. Man can and has survived without petroleum, but he cannot live without food." The two powers are now clearly the same. That the two are not only interdependent, but competitive as well, suggests more forcibly than Mr. Butz's words that "Food is a weapon."

And so, far from the concerns of "kindly use" that alone can assure a permanent agriculture and a permanent food supply, the Department of Agriculture is lost in the paper clouds of "agribusiness," propagating statistical proofs of visibly ruinous agricultural practices. One can imagine the average American nodding over these "expert" reports and projections. Whether he is nodding because he agrees or because he is asleep does not matter; there is no difference.

Thus the estrangement of consumer and producer, their evolution from collaborators in food production to competitors in the food market, involves a process of oversimplification on both sides. The consumer withdraws from the problems of food production, hence becomes ignorant of them and often scornful of them; the producer no longer sees himself as intermediary between people and land—the

people's respresentative on the land—and becomes interested only in production. The consumer eats worse, and the producer farms worse. And, in their estrangement, waste is institutionalized. Without regret, with less and less interest in the disciplines of thrift and conservation, with, in fact, the assumption that this is the way of the world, our present agriculture wastes topsoil, water, fossil fuel, and human energy—to name only the most noticeable things. Consumers participate "innocently" or ignorantly in all these farm wastes and add to them wastes that are urban or consumptive in nature: mainly all the materials and energy that go into unnecessary processing and packaging, as well as tons of organic matter (highly valuable—and certainly, in the long run, necessary—as fertilizer) that they flush down their drains or throw out as garbage.

What this means for conservationists is that, as consumers, they may be using—and abusing—more land by proxy than they are conserving by the intervention of their organizations. We now have more people using the land (that is, living from it) and fewer thinking about it than ever before. We are eating thoughtlessly, as no other entire society ever has been able to do. We are eating—drawing our lives out of our land—thoughtlessly. If we study carefully the implications of that, we will see that the agricultural crisis is not merely a matter of supply and demand to be remedied by some change of government policy or some technological "breakthrough." It is a crisis of culture.

The Agricultural Crisis as a Crisis of Culture

In my boyhood, Henry County, Kentucky, was not just a rural county, as it still is—it was a *farming* county. The farms were generally small. They were farmed by families who lived not only upon them, but within and *from* them. These families grew gardens. They produced their own meat, milk, and eggs. The farms were highly diversified. The main money crop was tobacco. But the farmers also grew corn, wheat, barley, oats, hay, and sorghum. Cattle, hogs, and sheep were all characteristically raised on the same farms. There were small dairies, the milking more often than not done by hand. Those were the farm products that might have been considered major. But there were also minor products, and one of the most important characteristics of that old economy was the existence of markets for minor products. In those days a farm family could easily market its surplus cream, eggs, old hens, and frying chickens. The power for