

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION^{1/}

by Ernest Swift

I consider it an honor to speak at this conference and to a group of professional foresters, many of whom are also friends. Most of you know that I am not a graduate forester; but with some degree of safety I can say that I have been a general practitioner in resource management. Therefore, I am going to speak from the viewpoint of a general practitioner.

We all reach conclusions as a result of our own individual activities and from where we sit in the grandstand and watch the passing parade. As a result we develop different perspectives, even though we may all be in the general business of conservation.

Today I am attempting to practice what I used to preach. I have a small acreage of hardwood--badly overgrazed when I bought it--and some open field plantings of red pine. I was raised on the land, and coming back to the land has been a great source of satisfaction. I am finding out that even on a 12-acre plot a great deal can be learned about plant and animal succession. I have a marsh hawk which patrols the pine plantation for mice, and a very truculent badger who controls the rabbit population in the hardwoods.

Lessons learned on the land become the foundation of all resource management, and in spite of the imperfections of human endeavors, lessons of and on the land develop the ecological conscience far better than academic theory or oratory. The classroom is a necessary medium for better land management--the land is not simply there, however, for the benefit of bigger and better classrooms.

1/ Address delivered at Conference banquet on September 9.

2/ Conservation Advisor, National Wildlife Federation.

In general terms we can say that the conservation movement started some hundred years ago as a three-pronged but definitely uncoordinated effort;

1. In the 1860's, such men as Olmsted and later Muir and Mathews were attempting to preserve some of the natural wonders of the West. Their untiring efforts led to the establishment of several of our most outstanding National Parks and subsequently to the creation of the National Park Service.

2. Then there was Increase Lapham, and later Fernow, then Pinchot and associates, advocating forest preserves and fire protection. This effort culminated in the establishment of the National Forests and the Forest Service.

3. The third effort was to stop the wanton slaughter of wildlife; buffalo, elk, passenger pigeons; the activities of the plumage hunters; and the commercialization of waterfowl. There were such men as Grinnell, Sheldon, Pierson, Shiras, and Lacey who pioneered in this effort.

A more recent program well within our own lifetime was that of saving the soil. It resulted in the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service.

The history of conservation progressed by fits and starts, and without much balance or consideration of all resources. We are just beginning to understand as a people that the whole natural pattern of ecology must be considered. Of course we have had many individuals who understood this basic premise, but we have not done so collectively as a people. Just how close we are to this complete understanding, this national ecological conscience, is a matter of opinion.

Today we are giving lip service to an all-out effort to manipulate the land and its products so as to satisfy a rapidly increasing number of human desires and a population which some feel will soon reach a saturation point.

Within a half century we have moved from a frontier concept into the space age. As humans increase, so in ratio does the utilization of resources. But the land must produce those resources, and the land does not expand with the growth of population. At what point the limit of the land's ability to produce will be reached is unknown. Near miracles have been performed in increasing farm production in the past 25 years.' This has come about at the expense of some other resources and resulted in their lasting damage.

We are occasionally warned of developing lopsided specialists because we cannot afford the arrogance of technological minutiae defeating the main objectives. But we are now encouraging some lopsided public attitudes because we have spawned a landless people whose concepts continue to recede

from a basic understanding of the elements that sustain them; people who bottle themselves up in concrete canyons, live a squirrel-cage existence, and take stupidity pills to endure the comforts that have been created for them.

The United States is a rich, an opulent, nation. The good living and luxuries enjoyed are a marvel even to its own citizens and the envy of the less fortunate. With the assumption that nothing will endanger this opulence we are now attempting a massive attack on the proposition of recreational opportunity. We are creating in the minds of these landless people the philosophy that they have been and are being denied their birthright. We are telling them that the entire conservation spectrum revolves around recreation. We are making conservation a spectator sport with no responsibilities to the individual and with no reference to the need of an economic base to support it, no reference to the ecological conscience, or the fact that recreation cannot feed off itself.

I have long and loyally supported the need for outdoor recreational opportunity, but I have never forgotten that it is basically a luxury bonus resulting from sound resource management.

In a fantastically short time, which is breathtaking, we are faced with new concepts of land-use priorities that are causing indigestion in some quarters. For one thing, a new species of public figure recently has come across the horizon. He is called the OUTDOOR PLANNER, and he is part psychiatrist, part welfare worker, and part chamber of commerce promoter; and too often, he has not grown up with any personal experience or responsibility in managing resources. We have a whole parade of professional terminologies, such as "the gospel of work versus the gospel of leisure," "recreation use projection," "intermediate recreation," and "formulas involving the variables used." Being a professional recreationist has now become fashionable and glamorous, and the person who wants to go on a picnic or take a long walk has become a specimen for microscopic study.

Professor C. R. Gregory of the University of Michigan has made the following statement which takes considerable digestive ability to assimilate on my part: "By 1984, recreation will be the number-one use of all state and federal land, and I suspect that the forest products industries will have to fit their activities to the recreation seekers, not the other way around, as now."

That is a pretty big bite to swallow, gentlemen, and leads one to speculate as to whether your efforts as professional foresters, which involves research, are going to be thrown out the window. We all know that within the philosophy of multiple-use, equal use cannot prevail on each acre, but this statement does not seem to contemplate multiple-use in the present accepted sense.

A bureau has been created by this session of Congress within the Department of Interior to coordinate all recreational efforts, federal and state. This bureau has ambitions of ultimately having a half billion dollar budget to use for loans to the states and for use by other federal bureaus. The ratio would be 60 percent for the state loans and 40 percent for the various federal bureaus. Money is a powerful force--either as an ear of corn tied to a stick to lead a donkey or to rawhide agencies into regimented action. This bureau is now expanding in manpower and establishing regional offices.

In part at least, its philosophies and objectives are contained in a statement by its Director, Edward C. Crafts: "Two basic philosophies reflect the orientation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The first is that the most important single force in outdoor recreation is private endeavor. The second is that the states occupy the key or pivotal role in government. These were the conclusions of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission and we subscribe to them fully. But let me say, too, that to the extent states and private enterprise fail to respond to their opportunities and public responsibilities to supply recreational demands, the federal government will tend to move in. This is the natural process in this country that follows private and state abdication. The pressure of recreational demand is such that it will not go unfulfilled and, if necessary, the federal government will fill the vacuum."

That word "abdication" is unfortunate. Within their ability, state agencies have assumed their responsibilities, well realizing the pressures on them for increased effort at this time. And what responsibilities to recreation have private land owners abdicated? Does that mean forest industry or farmers?

If forest industry attempts a multiple-use policy of equal production and equal recreation, can they supply their mills and keep up with market demands--which is public demand. Will recreation profits offset a reduction of raw materials? With this reduction, who will have jobs or money to recreate with?

With all these new philosophies confronting them I would say that forest industry has some very fundamental survival factors facing them. Survival includes taking risks in a highly competitive free economy, at the same time remaining solvent--and the latter means making a profit. That word "profit" is a nasty word to some people, in spite of the fact that it pays taxes and wages so that people can afford to recreate.

To be economically sound, forest industries require extensive acreages whose primary purpose is timber production; and industrial forests require much more than intelligent land management. There must be a guarantee of an equitable and stable tax base, because the harvest is not annual but must be figured in decades. High annual taxes can kill off the best managed industrial forest in existence.

With the rising tide of recreation, back-country land values are climbing. This has inspired some local tax assessors to look with a hopeful eye on taxing industrial forest holdings for their recreational potential as well as their timber crop. This in turn would increase the cost of the timber and its conversion if this idea prevailed, and too few budding conservation authorities of today realize that excessively high taxes prompted much of the cut-out-get-out policies of a few decades ago; that and the consequent fire risk.

Another problem is the utter disregard for private property rights on the part of recreationists, even though a minority is involved. Public agencies supplying recreation are in a constant battle against vandalism and have frequently documented the destruction, but in this instance the taxpayers foot the bill.

Fire is another constant hazard with people in the woods, especially during the dry seasons. And over and above the actual loss of timber, the pre-suppression costs of manpower and equipment will increase. Not only do the above-mentioned factors increase management costs, but the liability laws of many states are at present wholly inadequate to meet the situation.

This is no smoke screen that industry uses to hide behind, as over 90 percent of forest industry lands are open to the public for some form of recreation. Industry up to the present time has been reluctant to get into the user-fee business, but industry may be forced to climb on that bandwagon if they wish to survive the competition with public agencies and farmers.

I have been accused at times of using ludicrous comparisons, but if the Vikings' football team and the Twins' baseball team decided to move out of Minnesota would that constitute an abdication of sufficient importance for the federal government to go into the baseball and football business; and if I fail to supply picnic tables on my 12 acres am I some kind of a delinquent citizen?

For years there has been a cry that "multiple-use" is only a convenient slogan, and only accepted if the priority interest of groups and individuals come first. But Professor Gregory seems to give a priority to recreation regardless of other needs, such as community development, etc. And with the states and private industry being warned of abdication of responsibilities, multiple-use has received another cross-pollination of sanctimonious aphorism.

I am well aware that any speaker can use the term multiple-use as a stage setting, which by inference is supposed to establish his depth of understanding and void any potential challenge of the conservation gospel he might wish to preach. What does this term mean?

To some manufacturers, wise-use means dumping their filth into a nearby stream so as to reduce production costs; the spraying of herbicides or insecticides is construed as wise-use by farmers to increase crop production, and by highway departments to minimize labor costs.

Congressional sanction for the draining of wetlands becomes wise-use or a part of multiple-use so that new crops can come under price supports paid by the taxpayer for the benefits of a minority. Associated values in preserving water tables and wildlife are too unrealistic to be counted as wise-use. High dams on the Columbia River and its tributaries are authorized by the Federal Power Commission and considered multiple-use even though they destroy the Pacific salmon run and flood out much merchantable timber. Superhighways are sacrosanct even though they destroy much fertile land, and many marshes and clean-running streams.

Outdoor recreation today is attempting to pull itself up by its own bootstraps to a pedestal above the calculated grossness of merchandising as the epitome of multiple-use, but the present synthetic trends and commercialism do not rate this esthetic camouflage. So long as the urban dweller must bring his city images with him to the woods and is unhappy and lost without them, the primitive simplicity of the hinterlands will soon disappear.

It should be pointed out that all these enumerated activities can be included in multiple-use, but not to the exclusion or total disregard for other associated resources. Nor should the integrity of disagreement be impugned, but knowingly or unknowingly this juggling of words becomes a play on semantics to justify any situation wherein mankind desires to plunder this planet.

Most lamentable is the fact that many sincere conservationists have not come to realize the degree of distortions. Decisions must come before the "doing," and wise decisions take thought. There's the rub--too few think resource management through with all its complex ramifications.

The only definition to date that captures the entire spectrum of resource management was long ago expressed by Aldo Leopold: "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." That statement should be sufficient, but he goes on to enlarge in case some do not grasp the significance of "harmony."

"By land is meant all of the things, over, or in the earth. Harmony with the land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. This is to say, you cannot love game and hate predators; and you cannot build a forest and mine a farm. The land is one organism. Its parts, like our parts, compete with each other and cooperate with each other. The competitions are as much a part of the inner

workings as the cooperations. You can regulate them--cautiously--but you cannot abolish them."

I like the word caution. I think today we are hell-bent on a big recreational HURRAH without much caution, as we have done some other things in the past.

I well realize that in a democracy all things advance through compromise. Conservation is no exception. Nor will conservation prosper by having each of us join a mutual admiration society or by having us stuff our ears with cotton to drown out the opposition. To counteract this tendency of self-righteousness and to be apprised of the fact that conservation is composed of many facets of interest, we should listen to the views and problems of others with an open mind.

However, all tax supported programs should be able to stand the test of public scrutiny and debate. And there are times when an impatient administration condemns the friction of analysis as unwarranted criticism of its program. I am convinced that that is true today.

As a nation we pride ourselves on promoting a diversified economy as a safeguard to the general well-being of the nation, and at the same time boast of the simplification achieved in modifying the biological community. Successful farming, for example, has been aimed at pure stands of crops to a single species, as have forest plantings in many instances. We further eliminate any counteractives by various means including poisoning unwanted plants and insects--even animals.

We hold in contempt an affinity for working with nature; our unspoken goal is to subdue nature. Even the recreationists of today, the cottage owner and the transients, relish the idea of subjugation. Multiple-use has become a term of pious justification, whereas we should be learning to harmonize our efforts with nature, which is real multiple-use. Subjugation has become the entire concept of resource management, and we fail to recognize that as we continue to project this artificial creation, the entire structure of our civilization becomes more precarious. People who eulogize Muir and Thoreau do not want any part of the way they lived.

Part of our scientific efforts attempts to substantiate this philosophy under the terms multiple-use, while other parts would repudiate it. If our entire scientific effort does not accept the natural community and regulate it with extreme caution, there will always be needless destruction of resources. Man is a part of nature, and endless rows of test tubes cannot change this.

It might be well to re-examine what the test tubes have produced to see if the results are in harmony with each other, with nature, and with man's best interests. Possibly the first need is to redefine those interests in relation to man's well-being into the coming centuries.

Today's objectives are to create an artificial environment walling mankind away from the natural environment surrounding him. A state of harmony between men and land will become increasingly difficult to achieve, but as an indestructible principle it will survive mankind.

I am confident that the specialties which you gentlemen have developed will survive in spite of all the temporary interests which seem to have captured the public imagination and forced public agencies in charge of basic resources to divert their efforts. We will learn that recreation cannot feed off itself even though we have to learn the hard way.

It is a sign of maturity for every man to analyze the trend of the times, and if need be to walk alone. Maybe you will have to walk alone for the time being, but I predict, not for too long.