

THE MODERN ERA

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Editor's Introduction

Origins

A number of different philosophies, or perspectives, have guided Americans' interactions with the natural environment since the arrival of the first European settlers on the continent. Prior to the Europeans' arrival, the indigenous peoples of North America conserved the land and the plants and animals living upon it through small-scale hunting and gathering that left habitats largely intact, in large part because of a philosophy of reverence for Mother Earth and the animal and natural spirits that were her offspring. Besides fishing, hunting, and foraging, many tribes practiced some form of farming, but this too was on a small scale. There were no iron tools, no plow animals, and no harvesting machinery. All was accomplished by hand. There was also, generally speaking, no sense of *ownership* of the land. Rather, the earth belonged to all as a source of sustenance, security, and spirituality—unless one harmed it in some way and caused it to withhold its gifts. Obviously, there were many variations on this theme among the individual tribes, but, overall, the indigenous approach was one of respect and caution when it came to interactions with nature. This was because these peoples considered themselves to be *part of* nature, not something that stood apart from it. The natural world was not an *object* to be put to use for human ends; it was, rather, a *subject* in a shared philosophy of being that encompassed both the human and the natural.

The New World and Beyond

All of this changed with the arrival of the Europeans. The European explorers' and colonists' worldview was shaped by the Bible and the classics of Western thought. The new Euro-Americans had little respect for or appreciation of the wilderness. The case was quite the opposite, in fact. William Bradford, governor of Plymouth Colony, wrote that for him and the other colonists, the New World represented "a hideous & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts & wild men." The "woods and thickets" of which the new lands seemed to be made had a "wild & savage hue" that bespoke danger and hidden evils. In the far southwest, where Spanish explorers operated, the naked beauty of the region held no appeal for the Europeans. The Native Americans whom the explorers and settlers encountered were considered uncivilized barbarians in need of the Christian faith.

Nevertheless, most colonists and adventurers came to rely on the natives for knowledge about the weather, plants, and animals in their New World. As they adapted to their circumstances, they came to view the land as a source of crops that they could cultivate on their farms and in their gardens, the woods and fields as a source of game that could supplement the table, and the open space as theirs to transform into farms and additional settlements. In short, they came to appreciate the continent's natural resources as god-given gifts to humans, and saw themselves in the role of god's enterprising servants, intent on making the most of those gifts. As the growing white population in the Colonies appropriated more and more land, the native tribes found themselves with fewer and fewer sustaining resources available, and the conflict between the Indians and the Euro-Americans intensified.

The horse, first brought to the New World by the Spaniards in 1493, gave the Europeans a significant military advantage, and it soon transformed the lives of the Indians, particularly the Plains Indians (some of whom had been forced westward by whites). Draught animals helped the Euro-Americans clear forests and expand their agricultural fields. The US government, in fact, was eager to see the country's western lands—beginning with those immediately west of the Appalachian Mountains—populated with Europeans and their descendants. By 1783, following the Revolutionary War, the western boundary extended to the Mississippi River; and, twenty years later, Thomas Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France moved the young nation's western boundary to the Rocky Mountains. (Spain continued to control most of the territory west of the Rockies at the time.) Territorial growth came with increased industrialization in urban areas, thus requiring the development of an effective transportation system by the 1830s. Packed-surface turnpikes were extended or created, steamboat traffic on the rivers was increased, the Erie Canal was constructed, and railroads began to radiate out from the major cities. Apart from the odd early naturalist, such as William Bartram or John James Audubon, most US inhabitants continued to view nature as something they were meant to exploit for the betterment of humankind under the blessing of God.

In 1845, in an issue of *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, editor John O'Sullivan coined the term "Manifest Destiny" to justify the expansionist program of the Polk administration. O'Sullivan wrote, "Away, away with all these cobweb tissues of rights of discovery, exploration, settlement, contiguity, etc.... The American claim is by right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government entrusted to us...It is in our future far more than in our past...that our True Title [as master of the dominion] is to be found."

Conservationists

The period after the Civil War was one of rapid economic growth and infrastructure expansion. It was also one of mass westward movement as a result of the 1862 Homestead Act, which offered the heads of households grants of 160 acres of public land upon which to settle. Resources such as standing timber were coming under increasing strain. John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and other early conservationists saw the problem and urged the formulation of a federal forest conservation policy. Muir, in fact, was a *preservationist* who believed that nature had an intrinsic value beyond its mere usefulness to humankind. He held that wild places were essential to the health of the human spirit and therefore should be left undisturbed whenever possible. Although a political outsider, Muir was able to gain support for his views through his skill as a nature writer and his interest in promoting the emerging conservation movement. He helped to establish Yosemite National Park in central California in 1890 and the preservationist group, the Sierra Club, in 1892.

Gifford Pinchot, in contrast, was more a traditional *conservationist* who sought to manage natural resources for the benefit of society. Schooled in European principles of scientific forest management, Pinchot favored forest conservation not as an end in itself, à la Muir, but as a means of maintaining lumber resources for the building of homes and other uses. Politically savvy, Pinchot headed, , the National Forest Commission from 1896 to 1910, which became known in 1905 as the US Forest Service. Pinchot was an adviser to President Theodore Roosevelt, himself an advocate of conservation, and was able to successfully build support for the president's conservation plans by drawing in commercial interests such as timber companies, mining firms,

and ranching groups seeking grazing lands. Concessions or other arrangements were adopted both to maintain the land (at some agreed-upon level) as well as to make use of its natural resources. Pinchot created the Bureau of Reclamation, which began to dam some of the nation's wild rivers in order to maintain a reliable water supply and, later, to generate hydroelectric power.

Muir and Pinchot clashed over a plan by the city of San Francisco to turn Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley into a reservoir (through damming) in order to satisfy the city's growing water needs. Muir thought the idea was misguided—a symbol of human greed and willfulness. Pinchot, on the other hand, considered the plan a reasonable solution, given the valley's relatively remote location and the long-term water needs of San Francisco. In the end, the valley was dammed and flooded (1913). Although Muir died the following year, the Sierra Club and other preservationist groups successfully campaigned for an independent National Park Service and the banning of massive development projects in national parks.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a new round of conservation work got under way as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), established in the administration's first month in office, employed single men, aged 17 to 28, on conservation projects such as land reclamation, reforestation, fire fighting, and erosion control. A great number of projects were completed nationwide, and the CCC's work may still be seen to this day not only in the projects themselves but also in various CCC museums as well as the state and local volunteer groups that the program inspired. A sister program of the CCC's, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), was put to good use during the infamous Dust Bowl event of the mid-1930s, when vast areas of Oklahoma, Texas, and other south-central states were hit by drought and dense clouds of airborne dust from the earth's surface. Under the drought conditions, lands that had been planted were left exposed and the soil was easily carried away by strong winds, causing severe hardships for residents. The SCS showed farmers how to use contour plowing to help reduce runoff and to plant grass and trees in strategic locations to provide windbreaks and hold down the soil.

By mid-century, there remained two distinct conservation philosophies: the Muirist purist camp, which believed in preservation over resource development; and the Pinchotian management camp, which believed in

harnessing resources for human use but not at the price of permanent damage to the environment. Another key figure from the first half of the twentieth century, Aldo Leopold, developed principles that were able to reconcile the two views. Leopold started out as a student of Pinchot and worked in the US Forest Service (1909–28). He also had a strong love of pristine nature, however, and helped launch the first national wilderness area, Gila Wilderness Area, in New Mexico, in 1924. Leopold is credited with founding the science of game management, but he was just as interested in the power and beauty of natural places and ecological processes. In his influential book *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and other writings, he advanced the concept of a “land ethic,” whereby an action is good when it tends to preserve the integrity of the “biotic community,” or the ecosystem of an area, and it was wrong when it tended to destroy that community or ecosystem. Thus, Leopold combined the “wise use” perspective of Pinchot with the holistic, aesthetic perspective of Muir.

Modern Developments

Conservation science suffered something of a blow during the post-World War II boom years, if only out of neglect. By then the central focus of the nation was on economic growth and development. Populations spilled into new suburban tract homes, millions of which were erected each year. To power the expansion, researchers looked to the creation of nuclear energy systems, even as nuclear bombs continued to be exploded in the Pacific and elsewhere to test their effects. Automobile use burgeoned, creating a boon for the oil industry but a growing hazard in terms of air quality. Manufacturing plants continued to use poor methods of waste disposal, dumping chemicals into streams and rivers and discarding toxins in dumps and landfills. Only a few nature enthusiasts and professional conservationists maintained a concern about the cultivation of a proper “land ethic.”

The publication in 1962 of *Silent Spring* by biologist Rachel Carson, the modern environmental movement was born. The book presented an ecological view of environmental degradation. Written in an appealing style, it became a sensation overnight and inspired lay people, researchers, and policy makers alike to action. Carson argued, in particular, that the pesticides, which were in increasing use in agriculture, were being applied carelessly and with little thought to their long-term consequences. She suggested that

toxins left in the environment would eventually cycle through food, water, and other sources and reach human populations eventually. Even trace amounts in the body increased the risk of illnesses such as cancer. Other effects, potentially just as bad, were little known and generally unstudied. Although Carson was attacked by chemical companies, the effort only produced a backlash, as more people continued to become alarmed about the state of the environment and the attitude industry took toward it.

Thus, the 1960s and 1970s saw a rebirth of not only traditional environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society but also the emergence of new groups. “Environmental protection” became the watchword. These groups used research and analysis to publicize problems, hired lobbyists to pressure Congress and government agencies into action, and filed law suits against polluters, among other tactics. Widespread public support for environmental protection, and for conservation generally, contributed to the enactment of a variety of new laws, including the Clean Air Act (1963; major amendments 1970), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968), the Clean Water Act (1972), and the Endangered Species Act (1973). The Environment Protection Agency was established by none other than President Richard M. Nixon, himself no environmentalist, in response to public calls for regulating toxic chemicals and reducing pollution.

In the 1980s, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, environmental regulations were sharply cut back and industry, including the nuclear energy industry, was given incentives to expand. Meanwhile, researchers found evidence that the atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide stood to raise global temperatures—a phenomenon known at the time as global warming, and more recently as climate change. They had discovered that the release of chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, into the atmosphere was damaging the earth’s ozone layer, and further, that emissions from coal-fired power plants and other sources was producing acidic rain, which in turn was destroying wildlife habitats, introducing mercury into the foodstream, and even eroding human-built “hardscapes” (concrete structures, and the like). By the 1990s, yet another large-scale problem had been identified, namely, great algae “blooms” in places like the Gulf of Mexico, where the Mississippi River deposits runoff from fertilized fields upstream. The altered chemistry produces vast “dead zones” where little survives.

Today, the environmental movement consists of an

interconnected network of local, state, national, and international bodies working to reduce or reverse the harms caused by human actions. One of the key concerns at present is global climate change. Over the last two decades some progress on climate change has been made through various international “protocols” and agreements, most recently a 2016 agreement in Paris in which nations pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to stop global warming. Such agreements are certainly welcome by environmentalists. Yet, at the same time these activists understand that much work remains to be done at all levels, from the global to the local. Problems persist in areas such as air quality, soil health, water quality, forest conservation, rangeland management, marine habitats, plant and wildlife conservation, and energy use and the development of alternative energy sources.

Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD

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■ Theodore Roosevelt: On the Conservation of Natural Resources

Date: December 3, 1907

Author: Theodore Roosevelt

Genre: address; speech; petition

Summary Overview

President Theodore Roosevelt, in his seventh annual message to Congress, puts forward a set of proposals designed to protect the nation's natural resources. Americans, he says, take for granted the abundance of natural resources available to them, a perspective he considers foolish. He cites the need for more efficient mining and agricultural practices, updated irrigation projects, and the establishment of protected open spaces. The responsibility for each of these actions, he says, rests with the only entity capable of effectively carrying them out: the federal government.

Defining Moment

Perhaps to a degree unequalled by his predecessors, Theodore Roosevelt was an ardent wildlife enthusiast. Early in his presidency, he occasionally burst into cabinet meetings unexpectedly in order to tell the group of the birds he had just seen outside. Even before becoming president, Roosevelt once wrote to a curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, saying that he would like to see all wildlife given every protection possible. To some, Roosevelt's love of nature stemmed from his affinity for hunting. To others, his passion for the natural world went far beyond the animals he and his upper-class friends hunted.

Roosevelt's ascendency to the presidency in 1901 was unexpected: Republican Party officials had thrown him into the vice presidential slot with candidate William McKinley in 1900, but McKinley's assassination a year later brought Roosevelt and his ideals to the executive office. Although he assumed office without a popular mandate, he quickly established himself as a dynamic and popular leader. Meanwhile, the balance of power in government, which had through the Civil War greatly favored Congress over the president, had been

slowly shifting toward the executive, a trend Roosevelt used to his advantage.

In addition to his well-known "big stick" approach to foreign policy, Roosevelt saw a need to expand the reach of the federal government in order to protect the America's natural resources. Since the Civil War, the United States had been consuming its timber, mineral, and water resources at a nearly breakneck pace. Entire species of animals—such as the bison—were nearly wiped out by rampant and unregulated hunting. Conservationists such as John Muir, the Scottish-born American founder of the Sierra Club, called for more federal oversight of the country's resources, a push that was well received by the new president. A year after assuming office, Roosevelt introduced plans for more efficient irrigation projects and established federal agencies to gauge and protect the long-term health of the country's natural resources. Following his successful 1904 election campaign, Roosevelt established five national parks and five national natural monuments (including part of the Grand Canyon in 1906). His efforts to protect the nation's natural resources were largely successful—forest reserves alone grew from about 43 million acres to about 194 million acres by the end of Roosevelt's presidency. Meanwhile, the establishment of such nature preserves as the Florida Everglades ensured the protection of a wide range of animal and bird species.

In December 1907, Roosevelt, in one of his last addresses to Congress as president, reiterated his belief that the federal government should play a more active role in regulating the country's growth. Part of his address focused on the need for commercial and business regulation. Later in the address, however, he stresses the need for government to play a similar oversight role in ensuring the long-term stability of the country's natural resources.

Author Biography

Theodore Roosevelt was born on October 27, 1858, in New York City. On February 14, 1884, his first wife and his mother both died; Roosevelt spent about two years thereafter in the Badlands of Dakota Territory, hunting and recovering from his grief. As a lieutenant colonel with the US Army in the Spanish-American War, he famously led a charge up San Juan Hill and earned dis-

tingtion as a war hero. Shortly thereafter, he was elected governor of New York, and later, at the age of forty-two, became the nation's youngest president. After endorsing William Howard Taft as his successor in 1908, Roosevelt left office (although he ran for president again unsuccessfully in 1912) and went on a safari. He later returned to his home in Oyster Bay, New York. He died on January 6, 1919.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

. . . The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life.... As a nation we not only enjoy a wonderful measure of present prosperity but if this prosperity is used aright it is an earnest of future success such as no other nation will have. The reward of foresight for this nation is great and easily foretold. But there must be the look ahead, there must be a realization of the fact that to waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed. For the last few years, through several agencies, the government has been endeavoring to get our people to look ahead and to substitute a planned and orderly development of our resources in place of a haphazard striving for immediate profit. Our great river systems should be developed as national water highways, the Mississippi, with its tributaries, standing first in importance, and the Columbia second, although there are many others of importance on the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Gulf slopes. The National Government should undertake this work, and I hope a beginning will be made in the present Congress; and the greatest of all our rivers, the Mississippi, should receive special attention. From the Great Lakes to the mouth of the Mississippi there should be a deep waterway, with deep waterways leading from it to the East and the West. Such a waterway would practically mean the extension of our coastline into the very heart of our country. It would be of incalculable benefit to our people. If

begun at once it can be carried through in time appreciably to relieve the congestion of our great freight-carrying lines of railroads. The work should be systematically and continuously carried forward in accordance with some well-conceived plan. The main streams should be improved to the highest point of efficiency before the improvement of the branches is attempted; and the work should be kept free from every taint of recklessness or jobbery. The inland waterways which lie just back of the whole Eastern and Southern coasts should likewise be developed. Moreover, the development of our waterways involves many other important water problems, all of which should be considered as part of the same general scheme. The government dams should be used to produce hundreds of thousands of horse-power as an incident to improving navigation; for the annual value of the unused water-powered of the United States perhaps exceeds the annual value of the products of all our mines. As an incident to creating the deep waterways down the Mississippi, the government should build along its whole lower length levees which, taken together with the control of the headwaters, will at once and forever put a complete stop to all threat of floods in the immensely fertile delta region. The territory lying adjacent to the Mississippi along its lower course will thereby become one of the most prosperous and populous, as it already is one of the most fertile, farming regions in all the world. I have appointed an inland waterways commission to study and outline a comprehensive scheme of development along all the lines indicated. Later I shall lay its report before the Congress.

Irrigation should be far more extensively developed than at present, not only in the States of the great plains and the Rocky Mountains, but in many others, as, for

instance, in large portions of the South Atlantic and Gulf States, where it should go hand in hand with the reclamation of swampland. The Federal Government should seriously devote itself to this task, realizing that utilization of waterways and water-power, forestry, irrigation, and the reclamation of lands threatened with overflow, are all interdependent parts of the same problem. The work of the Reclamation Service in developing the larger opportunities of the Western half of our country for irrigation is more important than almost any other movement. The constant purpose of the government in connection with the Reclamation Service has been to use the water resources of the public lands for the ultimate greatest good of the greatest number; in other words, to put upon the land permanent home-makers, to use and develop it for themselves and for their children and children's children....

The effort of the government to deal with the public land has been based upon the same principle as that of the Reclamation Service. The land law system which was designed to meet the needs of the fertile and well-watered regions of the Middle West has largely broken down when applied to the drier regions of the Great Plains, the mountains, and much of the Pacific slope, where a farm of 160 acres is inadequate for self-support.... Three years ago a public-lands commission was appointed to scrutinize the law, and defects, and recommend a remedy. Their examination specifically showed the existence of great fraud upon the public domain, and their recommendations for changes in the law were made with the design of conserving the natural resources of every part of the public lands by putting it to its best use. Especial attention was called to the prevention of settlement by the passage of great areas of public land into the hands of a few men, and to the enormous waste caused by unrestricted grazing upon the open range. The recommendations of the Public-Lands Commission are sound, for they are especially in the interest of the actual home-maker; and where the small home-maker cannot at present utilize the land they provide that the government shall keep control of it so that it may not be monopolized by a few men. The Congress has not yet acted upon these recommendations, but they are so just and proper, so essential to our national welfare, that I

feel confident, if the Congress will take time to consider them, that they will ultimately be adopted.

Some such legislation as that proposed is essential in order to preserve the great stretches of public grazing-land which are unfit for cultivation under present methods and are valuable only for the forage which they supply. These stretches amount in all to some 300,000,000 acres, and are open to the free grazing of cattle, sheep, horses, and goats, without restriction. Such a system, or lack of system, means that the range is not so much used as wasted by abuse. As the West settles, the range becomes more and more overgrazed. Much of it cannot be used to advantage unless it is fenced, for fencing is the only way by which to keep in check the owners of nomad flocks which roam hither and thither, utterly destroying the pastures and leaving a waste behind so that their presence is incompatible with the presence of home-makers. The existing fences are all illegal.... All these fences, those that are hurtful and those that are beneficial, are alike illegal and must come down. But it is an outrage that the law should necessitate such action on the part of the Administration. The unlawful fencing of public lands for private grazing must be stopped, but the necessity which occasioned it must be provided for. The Federal Government should have control of the range, whether by permit or lease, as local necessities may determine. Such control could secure the great benefit of legitimate fencing, while at the same time securing and promoting the settlement of the country.... The government should part with its title only to the actual home-maker, not to the profit-maker who does not care to make a home. Our prime object is to secure the rights and guard the interests of the small ranchman, the man who ploughs and pitches hay for himself. It is this small ranchman, this actual settler and home-maker, who in the long run is most hurt by permitting thefts of the public land in whatever form.

Optimism is a good characteristic, but if carried to an excess it becomes foolishness. We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so. The mineral wealth of the country, the coal, iron, oil, gas, and the like, does not reproduce itself, and therefore is certain to be exhausted ultimately; and wastefulness in dealing with it today means that our descendants will feel the exhaustion a generation or two before they oth-

erwise would. But there are certain other forms of waste which could be entirely stopped—the waste of soil by washing, for instance, which is among the most dangerous of all wastes now in progress in the United States, is easily preventable, so that this present enormous loss of fertility is entirely unnecessary. The preservation or replacement of the forests is one of the most important means of preventing this loss. We have made a beginning in forest preservation, but...so rapid has been the rate of exhaustion of timber in the United States in the past, and so rapidly is the remainder being exhausted, that the country is unquestionably on the verge of a timber famine which will be felt in every household in the land.... The present annual consumption of lumber is certainly three times as great as the annual growth; and if the consumption and growth continue unchanged, practically all our

lumber will be exhausted in another generation, while long before the limit to complete exhaustion is reached the growing scarcity will make itself felt in many blighting ways upon our national welfare. About twenty per cent of our forested territory is now reserved in national forests, but these do not include the most valuable timberlands, and in any event the proportion is too small to expect that the reserves can accomplish more than a mitigation of the trouble which is ahead for the nation.... We should acquire in the Appalachian and White Mountain regions all the forest-lands that it is possible to acquire for the use of the nation. These lands, because they form a national asset, are as emphatically national as the rivers which they feed, and which flow through so many States before they reach the ocean.

Document Analysis

Roosevelt's address touches on a number of topics, but his theme is consistent: the federal government must play a larger role in regulating the systems and resources that enable the nation to continue to enjoy its prosperity. During the latter part of his speech, he stresses the need for government to help conserve the nation's myriad natural resources.

One of the areas on which this policy would bear was the nation's waterways. The rivers, lakes, and other waterways throughout the United States could become "national water highways," he says, transporting freight not just to the major ports of the East and West Coasts, but to the nation's interior as well. The country's rail system was heavily congested, he states, an issue that would be alleviated by the development of this "highway." In order to make this vision possible, Roosevelt proposes a series of government projects designed to widen and deepen rivers and shores in order to accommodate larger boats. He also proposes the construction of dams and levees to facilitate water-based transportation.

As part of the development of the country's waterways, Roosevelt says, the government should also undertake the development of improved and more efficient irrigation systems. Such projects, coupled with the presence of levees (which would safeguard against the flooding common in the watersheds of the Mississippi and Columbia Rivers as well as the Great Lakes),

would aid in the economic development of the Midwest, South, and Northwest by attracting more farmers and commerce.

Additionally, Roosevelt says, it was essential for the government to continue its efforts to reclaim open wetlands in places such as the Gulf states. Roosevelt had already established a special Public Lands Commission designed to analyze existing laws governing the country's fertile farmlands. Here he references this commission's findings and recommendations—which he calls sound—and points to the fact that Congress had yet to adopt any of the commission's proposals.

Furthermore, Roosevelt comments on grazing practices in places such as the as-yet underdeveloped West Coast. In these locations, cattle farmers were fencing off public lands for their own private grazing, leading to overuse and destruction of these pastures through soil erosion and depletion. It was the responsibility of the federal government, Roosevelt says, to expand its oversight to protect and sustain these lands.

It was also incumbent upon the federal government to continue its efforts to protect the nation's forests, Roosevelt adds. Americans mistakenly believed that their natural resources were limitless, he says—the government needed to play a role in reversing that attitude. He, therefore, proposes continuing his policy of acquiring the forests of the White Mountains and the Appalachian Mountains. Such land acquisitions would conserve two vital timber regions as well as the

waterways that came from them. The presence of government-sponsored lands in some of the country's most populated areas would help foster a new appreciation of America's natural resources, he says.

Essential Themes

The son of a cofounder of the American Museum of Natural History, Theodore Roosevelt was himself an avid outdoors and nature enthusiast. As one of the first presidents of the twentieth century, Roosevelt's presence in the White House has been considered fortuitous for the nation, therefore, as the country was on the verge of overusing its natural resources. Roosevelt's seventh annual address to Congress (and indeed the entire nation) provided a reminder of the need for sustainable natural resource use in the modern United States.

Roosevelt, who during his presidency was taking advantage of a trend in which the executive branch was enjoying an increasing amount of political power, had already expanded significantly the federal government's control over a large portion of open space in the nation. He used his seventh address to call for further federal acquisitions of forest areas in New England and the Mid-Atlantic area as well as swampland in the South. In it, he also makes a point to call for federal projects to improve the nation's irrigation and maritime systems. Such projects, he argues, would lessen dependence on the rails and bring much-needed economic development in the Midwest, the South, and the Northwest.

Roosevelt's speech has two main themes to accompany its proposals. The first is that the United States had for too long operated under the mistaken notion

that its natural resources were too plentiful to exhaust. Roosevelt argues that it was time for a change in attitude. The country's timber and mineral resources—and even grazing land—were rapidly depleting and, without intervention, would continue to decrease.

Roosevelt's second main point is that the federal government had to be the entity to intervene. He says he has created agencies and commissions to increase oversight over the country's natural resources—these entities had already achieved success in increasing awareness of and protecting natural resources. However, Roosevelt stresses that in order to move into the next steps toward conservation and sustainable development, Congress must recognize and support his agenda.

—Michael P. Auerbach, MA

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