

Remarks at George Washington National Forest, Virginia October 13, 1999

Thank you very much, Peter Pinchot, Secretary Glickman, Under Secretary Lyons. I also want to acknowledge Mike Dombeck, the Chief of the Forest Service, and George Frampton, the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality.

There are many, many things I'd like to say today, but before I begin, there has been—there was a development in the news today that I need to make a comment on, because I believe this is my only opportunity to see the press and, through them, to speak to the American people.

Philip Morris Company Admission

So I would like to just take a moment to note that after years of denial and deception, the Philip Morris Company has admitted that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer and other diseases. This formal acknowledgement comes far too late, but still we must all welcome it. It can be the beginning of clearing the air.

It certainly makes clear, as I've said for years, that the tobacco companies should answer for their actions in court. They should stop marketing their products to children. And certainly, they should do much more to reduce youth smoking. So this is a good day for the cause of public health and our children in America.

Forest Roadless Areas

Now, Peter talked about his grandfather and Theodore Roosevelt. One of my proudest possessions—some of you know I collect old books about America. I just finished reading a fascinating account by Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in the Cabinet, who was President Franklin Roosevelt's Labor Secretary during his entire tenure, about her 35-year relationship with Roosevelt. One of my proudest old American books is a first printing of the proceedings of the very first Governors' conference, held at the invitation of Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. The subject was the conservation of America's natural resources.

In my private dining room at the White House I have a picture of Theodore Roosevelt and all those Governors, signed by all the Governors with whom I served in 1992, when I was elected President. That first Governors' con-

ference remains one of the most important ever held in the White House. So much of what we've done as a nation to conserve our natural resources extends from that day. Peter's grandfather was a guiding spirit behind that conference.

Theodore Roosevelt, himself, said of Gifford Pinchot, "If it hadn't been for him, this conference neither would have nor could have been called." Gifford Pinchot used to say that we must prefer results to routine. I like that a lot. [Laughter] And let me say that, in my view, no one illustrates that principle in our public life today better than Mike Dombeck, who has done such a remarkable job of returning the Forest Service to the vision of stewardship on which it was founded. And I thank you, sir.

A century ago, when Mr. Pinchot was first dreaming up his plan to protect our forests, this vista looked very different than what we see today. In fact, it was more wasteland than forest. According to one eyewitness, and I quote, "Weather-white ghosts of trees stood on the desolate slopes as a pitiful, battle-scarred fragment of the glory that was once a virgin forest. Not only were the slopes nearly bare, tanneries and dye plants had poisoned the lakes and the mountain streams. The deer and black bear and turkey nearly were wiped out. The land and water were so thoroughly abused that most people thought the area had no value at all."

I know that they don't agree with that now because we have so many of the fine local officials from this area show up here today. I thank them for their presence, and they can be proud of what they represent.

Visionaries like Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, the other men and women of the Forest Service who have cared for this land since 1917, made those dark descriptions a part of history. Nowadays, hundreds of thousands of visitors come here every year to hike, swim, bike, hunt, fish, or just to breathe the fresh air and take in the beautiful sights. The land that once no one wanted is now a thriving forest everyone can enjoy.

This kind of land has been important to me since I was a boy, where I learned by walking the Ozark and Quachita National Forests of my

home State that national forests are more than a source of timber, they are places of renewal of the human spirit and our natural environment. At the dawn of the new century we have the opportunity to act on behalf of these forests in a way that honors the vision of our forebears, Roosevelt and Pinchot.

Within our national forests there are large parcels of land that don't contain roads of any kind and, in most cases, never have. From the beautiful stretch of the Alleghenies that we see here to the old-growth canyonlands of Tahoe National Forest, these areas represent some of the last, best unprotected wildlands anywhere in our Nation. They offer unparalleled opportunities for hikers, hunters, and anglers. They're absolutely critical to the survival of many endangered species, as you have just heard. And I think it's worth pointing out they are also very often a source of clean and fresh water for countless communities. They are, therefore, our treasured inheritance.

Today we launch one of the largest land preservation efforts in America's history to protect these priceless, back-country lands. The Forest Service will prepare a detailed analysis of how best to preserve our forests' large roadless areas and then present a formal proposal to do just that. The Forest Service will also determine whether similar protection is warranted for smaller roadless areas that have not yet been surveyed.

Through this action, we will protect more than 40 million acres, 20 percent of the total forest land in America in the national forests, from activities such as new road construction which would degrade the land. We will ensure that our grandchildren will be able to hike up to this peak, that others like it across the country will also offer the same opportunities. We will assure that when they get to the top they'll be able to look out on valleys like this, just as beautiful then as they are now.

We will live up to the challenge Theodore Roosevelt laid down a century ago to leave this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.

It is very important to point out that we are not trying to turn the national forests into museums. Even as we strengthen protections, the majority of our forests will continue to be responsibly managed for sustainable timber production and other activities. We are, once again, determined to prove that environmental protec-

tion and economic growth can and must go hand in hand.

Let me give you an example, because I've seen a lot of people already saying a lot of terrible things about what I'm doing today and how it is going to end the world as we know it. [Laughter] This initiative should have almost no effect on timber supply. Only 5 percent of our country's timber comes from the national forests. Less than 5 percent of the national forests' timber is now being cut in roadless areas. We can easily adjust our Federal timber program to replace 5 percent of 5 percent, but we can never replace what we might destroy if we don't protect these 40 million acres.

As the previous speaker said, today's action is the latest step taken under the administration of Vice President Gore and me to expand our children's natural treasures. Over the past 6½ years, we've protected millions of acres, from the Yellowstone to the Everglades, from the ancient redwoods of Headwaters to the red rock canyons of Utah. We're working now to save New Mexico's spectacular Baca Ranch.

As Secretary Babbitt has said many times, our administration has now protected more land than any in the history of the country except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt.

I have also proposed an unprecedented \$1 billion lands legacy initiative, with permanent funding over the years to guarantee for the first time ever a continuing fund for protecting and restoring precious lands across America. This initiative represents the largest investment in protecting our green and open spaces since President Theodore Roosevelt set our Nation on this path nearly a century ago. It would allow us to save Civil War battlefields, remote stretches of the historic Lewis and Clark Trail, nearly half a million acres in California desert parks and wilderness areas. It will also allow us to meet the stewardship challenges of the new century by helping communities save small but sacred spaces closer to home.

Unfortunately, this Congress seems intent on walking away from this opportunity. They're trying to slash lands legacy funding by a full two-thirds this year alone, with no action at all to ensure permanent funding in the years ahead. This is not an isolated case, unfortunately. Once again, the leaders of the Republican majority are polluting our spending bills with special-interest riders that would promote overcutting in our forests, allow mining companies to dump

more toxic waste on public land, and give a huge windfall to companies producing oil on Federal lands. I have vetoed such bills before because they were loaded up with antienvironmental riders. If necessary, I will do so again.

So, as Congress completes its work on the Interior bill, again I ask the leadership to send me a clean bill that adequately funds the lands legacy initiative and other priorities. But let me be clear: If the Interior bill lands on my desk looking like it does now, I will give it a good environmental response. I will send it straight back to the recycling bin. *[Laughter]*

Ever since that first Governors' conference back in 1908, conservation has been a cause important enough to Americans to transcend party lines. I hope, somehow, we can make it a bipartisan, even a nonpartisan, issue again. Theodore Roosevelt was a great Republican President. Franklin Roosevelt was a great Democratic President. President Nixon signed a bill creating the Environmental Protection Agency. Over and over again in the last 7 years in which I have had the honor to serve as President, I have worked with people who were both Democrats and Republicans on conservation issues.

Again I have the feeling that this is not a partisan issue anywhere but Washington, DC, and perhaps in a few other places throughout the country. We can't afford that.

When I was a boy growing up in my hometown, it was in a national park, and I could never be in the downtown of my hometown, which was a big city by Arkansas standards, 35,000 people—that even if you were anywhere downtown, you weren't more than 5 minutes walk from the woods.

I know what this can mean to our children and our future. When I was Governor, I was proud that, after leaving office after 12 years, we had—a higher percentage of our land in Arkansas was timberland than it was on the day that I took office, for the first time. And we always did this across party lines. No State was

more active in using the Nature Conservancy to buy land and set it aside, and we always did it across party lines.

When people walk through these woods and run into one another, they may talk a lot of things, but I'll bet you very few of them say, "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" I'll bet you've never asked anybody that on a mountain trail.

We want this for our children forever. And it is important that we set a good example. Earlier, Mr. Pinchot talked about the deterioration of the rain forests and the loss of biodiversity around the globe. If we want to help other people meet those challenges and the even larger challenge of climate change, we have to set a good example. We have the wealth and security to do it. We also have no excuse, because now we have the scientific knowledge and the technical means to grow the economy while we improve the environment.

It is no longer necessary to grow a modern economy by destroying natural resources and putting more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. In fact, we can create more jobs by following a responsible path to sustainable development.

So I hope this day will be important not only for our forestlands but the preservation of fresh water and biodiversity and recreational opportunities. I hope it will be the first step in America resuming a path of responsible leadership toward the environmental future we will increasingly share with our neighbors all across the globe. And I hope all of you will always be very proud of the role you have played in this special day.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. at Reddish Knob Overlook. In his remarks, he referred to Peter Pinchot, environmental consultant, Pinchot Institute for Conservation, and grandson of Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service.