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OREGON'S HERITAGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES—SHALL THEY  
BE CONSERVED FOR THE PEOPLE?

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ADDRESS

OF

MR. JOSEPH N. TEAL

CHAIRMAN OREGON STATE CONSERVATION  
COMMISSION

DELIVERED  
AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

ON

COMMONWEALTH DAY

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# Oregon's Heritage of Natural Resources

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## Shall They Be Conserved for the People?

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The University of Oregon is to be congratulated on having inaugurated an annual occasion where on "Commonwealth Day" representatives of the people of this state will meet, and from the lessons of the past draw inspiration for the future. It is peculiarly appropriate that this movement should have sprung from an institution which, as time goes on, will represent more and more the hopes and aspirations of our great state. From within her walls in ever increasing numbers will go the men and women who, to a great extent, will mould the public sentiment of our people and shape the destinies of our commonwealth. It is well, therefore, that in their Alma Mater they are taught what they owe to that greater Mother, the State of Oregon. Here they will learn that her interests and welfare and their interests and welfare are identical, and that in protecting and conserving them they are helping themselves, and, in a small degree, repaying a debt their gratitude and love should make it a pleasure to liquidate.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to be with you today to participate in your discussions, and to do what little I can to add interest to the occasion. The fact that I am a native son of Oregon, that I am proud to claim Eugene as my birth place, may serve to explain to some extent why it is so peculiarly gratifying to me to be here and participate in the exercises.

In dealing with the subject in hand, if I can awaken you to the fact that you have a real interest in it, that a solemn duty and obligation rests upon you to do your part in conserving our great natural wealth, I will feel amply repaid. An orator would have but little difficulty, with the material at hand, to paint in glowing colors our wondrous resources. One's vocabulary is sadly taxed to describe in fitting terms our great mountains, rushing streams, and glorious valleys. Not being an orator I shall not attempt this, nor do I think any permanent result would follow. I am here to tell facts, to enunciate a few principles, to point out the path if I can, where duty leads. This is all very prosaic, and I fear somewhat dull. But after all, what higher motive can actuate one, than trying to so live that the world will be some better because one has lived in it. It is a fact, a certainty, that only through service for others can you ever get out of life what there is really in it. You have all read, and many of you know of your own knowledge, of the vast resources with which kindly Providence has blessed this state. We have our forests, unequalled in magnitude and quality; water powers awaiting development in every section of the state; minerals of all kinds; rivers that can be easily made navigable, and harbors that can be made safe; the lordly chinook and other food fishes are still with us; we have millions of acres of virgin soil awaiting the hardy settler. But why enumerate? This state is singularly blessed in soil, climate and natural resources of all kinds, and while in the past their very abundance has made us profligate of our patrimony, it is fortunate that we are yet in a position to conserve them to a very considerable extent.

During the past year or two, owing to the patriotic work of a few men, led by President Roosevelt, the attention of the country has been riveted on the fact that many of our National resources are diminishing and being destroyed so rapidly that in some instances the time can be predicted almost to a certainty when, under present conditions of use, misuse and waste, some of the things we look on as necessities of life will be gone. Some of these necessities, like coal, oil and ore, cannot be repro-

duced. It is undeniable that on every hand there has been wanton waste in use and a steady growth toward monopolization in ownership. This tendency is as apparent in this state as in any other section. Until of late there has been no conception either of this enormous waste or monopolization, or any heed given to the consequences. A common heritage has been dissipated with a lavish hand, and a protestant met with but slight courtesy, let alone attention.

Our representatives would meet, and in council chamber and legislative hall grant with most reckless prodigality and unconcern invaluable rights and privileges belonging to the whole people. But we have now arrived at the turn of the road and the battle is on for the preservation of the rights of the public in and to the public wealth. It is now recognized and conceded by every one that something must be done, some way found to prevent the waste of the past, to make the best use of our resources for the present and to conserve them for the future. It is therefore of first importance to understand our relationship towards these natural resources. Are they ours to do with as we please, to use or destroy as we see fit, or are they ours to use to the best advantage and with the least loss and to pass on, improved if possible, for the use of others yet to follow? We have become so accustomed to the idea of an ownership that continues forever, that we have quite lost our perspective of things. We have no conception of eternity or perpetuity, only an omniscient being has. Yet we grant rights belonging to the people as a whole, in perpetuity just as cheerfully as we make a lease of our own property for a few years, and with much less thought or care as to its terms. With our limited knowledge we give to one man, and to his heirs and assigns forever, the most valuable rights and property without the slightest thought as to our moral right to thus bind unborn generations. The saving grace in it all, however, is the fact that none of us thus give away property of our own, and the vast majority of others do not thus handle property in their hands as trustees. Therefore, if we once can get fixed, settled and thoroughly bottomed the fundamental principle

that in dealing with the rights and property of the public we are handling a trust estate, many of our difficulties will disappear.

People are inherently honest. Never get any other thought in your mind. Men ordinarily want to do what is right. This is not to say that one is not influenced very often by his own interests, his environments, his surroundings; he is. Under such circumstances one very often does things he cannot square with the principles of abstract justice. But as a whole, man is honest. If it were not so, this world would indeed be a sad place to contemplate.

The position I take is that the conservation movement is consciously or unconsciously predicated on the idea that we occupy the position of trustees towards our natural resources. If I am right in this, and our actions were based on this principle, you can readily imagine we would be much more careful in our dealings with them, than we would if we felt they were our own to do with as we pleased. This world was not made for us alone. If it were, it would be a splendid example of economic waste, for we are not worth it. Before our day countless millions have inherited it and gone. After us countless millions will come and go. Could it ever have been intended that during our temporary occupancy we should have such a complete control of God's gifts to man that we by our ipse dixit, our legislative will, could control forever by whom these gifts might be used or enjoyed, or put in the hands of any man or creature of man the power to fix the price at which possibly necessities of life can be secured? My mind rejects the thought. It is to me an egotism so profound that I cannot grasp it. It is my belief that in dealing with the public heritage the most careful consideration should be given not only for present uses, but for future needs.

Sometimes an illustration is worth hours of argument. A live question today (or rather it was alive the other day) is the right, or perhaps we should say the policy, of granting water powers in perpetuity. I presume the courts would

What is everybody's business is nobody's business, and these unfortunate results follow. But if my opinion that this resource is a trust, that it is ours to use, not to destroy, is sound, no man would dare to thus dissipate a trust estate.

If there be any so blind that he cannot see the utter indefensibility of a right, legal or moral, to thus destroy (to put it selfishly) the sources of such rich revenues, then such a one is hopeless. It is when one attempts to correct such manifest evils, one is placed under the temptation that is first recorded as successfully applied in the twenty-fifth chapter of Genesis when Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. We are told that investments will not be made, the country will not be developed, capital will avoid us, commerce languish, unless we turn over such of our resources as may be desired to the free, unrestrained and perpetual use of those wanting them. The immediate result to ourselves is placed in the balance as against the future which others will enjoy, and too often we yield when we should be firm.

It matters not what subject may be under consideration—fisheries, powers, municipal franchises, grants of all kinds—the cry is always the same; and to carry the biblical parallel further, it will always be found that while the hand may be that of Esau the voice is that of Jacob. It hardly seems necessary to say that such a policy, while possibly producing temporary benefits, will in the end prove our undoing, and we will be rudely awakened to find some of our resources gone forever, and others in the iron hands of monopoly. We will find in the hands of private owners instruments rightly belonging to the public (the use of which we but dimly understand today) which should be owned and controlled by the state.

Passing legal questions and resting our position on the broad platform of the public welfare both present and future, how should we treat these public resources? Should they be conserved or should they be granted indiscriminately to the first to apply and let the future take care of itself? Which policy is the best from a practical standpoint? Which policy

makes for real patriotism, for higher citizenship, for enlightenment, and the comfort, happiness and well being of the people generally, and which for selfishness, for self interest? It is certain that if the young men and women who receive their teaching in this university go out into the world believing they owe a duty not only to themselves, but to others, and believing, act, they will not only make better citizens, will not only not live for themselves alone, but will have the profound satisfaction of knowing that nothing can take from them the reward that follows from having helped others, of feeling that they have done what they could to make the world better, life easier and happier, and while securing what was rightly theirs, helped others along the road of life.

Real happiness can only come with service. This is a profound truth, and it is well it is so. With such a powerful emotion as selfishness to grapple with, it is well indeed that real happiness results in a greater degree from service and generosity. We all owe service to this magnificent state of ours. Try as we may, we can never hope to repay even in a small way the debt we all owe her. If you will consider your opportunities, the great future which is before you, you will find that it lies in the natural resources of this state. This condition is not of your creation, it is your good fortune. And if I could I would cause to sink deep into the heart and conscience of every child and man in this commonwealth the obligation he is under to the state of his birth or adoption. While this movement is yet in its infancy there is work for everyone. Too often we wait for that psychological moment which rarely comes to do some great deed, startle the world and leap at once into a niche in the Hall of Fame. Or else we overlook the plain, homely duties of every day life, and longingly gaze at distant lands where opportunity seems greater. It but seems. A near approach would reveal the truth and disclose that it is but an illusion.

In Oregon today are opportunities in every direction for work that will bring results. We do not have to seek for places, they are at hand. Our forests, mines, waters, lands,

uphold the power of the legislature to grant such a title. Of course if it could grant one it could grant all, and if it can regulate the procedure under which they can be secured it can grant them outright. Assuming then a legislature has this power, your delegates, your representatives can today grant to one man every water power over which the state has jurisdiction forever. Without discussing the legal phases of the question, or analyzing closely the underlying principles, it seems to me that from the standpoint of right and wrong, from the standpoint of good morals, no such right ought to exist, and certainly no such right should be exercised by representatives of the people.

Our treatment of the salmon industry is another excellent illustration. Here we have a natural resource which even today, on a reasonable basis, represents a capitalization of at least \$50,000,000. This resource clearly belongs to the state. It is subject to state regulation and control, even to the extent of total prohibition of fishing. Properly conserved it will not only be a never ending source of food supply and revenue, but an increasing one. How have we treated this munificent endowment? We have made a pretense of an attempt at protection and conservation. Every one knows who has taken enough interest in the subject to keep in touch that for years past our legislative halls have been a place where the down river fisherman and the up river fisherman, where the gill netter, the seiner, the wheel man, met in mortal combat to have laws framed in his respective interests. And that interest was to devise ways and means so that the salmon could be taken more readily and for longer periods, and if possible to prevent the other fellow from getting any. Who ever saw anyone standing up and fighting in behalf of the real party in interest—the people of the state? Most of those who had built canneries and owned other gear were interested only in securing the greatest catch in the shortest possible time. This went to the point where the people with a fine sense of the fitness of things when they got the opportunity, supported both the upper and lower river bills to protect salmon at the last election. Did any-



one not directly interested in the taking of fish venture a suggestion, he was treated by both sides as a common enemy, as one interfering in a situation with which he had no concern. The result was what might have been expected. A steadily diminishing supply, a magnificent fish threatened with extinction, an industry with destruction, a natural resource with exhaustion. Such a wicked policy carries with it its own condemnation. But who is responsible for the situation? We all are. To put it mildly it is not an edifying spectacle to see a sovereign state submitting to the dictation of a few, who, for immediate gain, would destroy a patrimony belonging to all, as well as those to follow.

What is true of our fisheries is true of our game. Many seem to resent the idea that any one, even the state, should interfere with the number of fish one can catch, or when they can be caught. They want to kill game in season and out of season. Destroy ducks and other wild game birds in their breeding grounds, and at any and all times. They want the right to slaughter the game of the state without regard to the future. The extinction of the buffalo was not realized until it was too late. Too many view this resource as one of no particular practical value, and class it simply as a means of sport for a few. Beside the fact that one should not kill any of God's creatures just for the sake of killing, there is a practical view of the question that should not be overlooked and there is no reason why, instead of game birds and fishes becoming exhausted, the supply should not be maintained.

The waste of the forests has been appalling, and even now plans are being formulated to reforestize vast areas of lands. The great burns found through all our mountains, the gross carelessness and indifference to the value of this great asset which has characterized our actions in the past need no comment. It is time all these acts of colossal folly were stopped. It is time the people aroused themselves and asserted their rights. Supreme selfishness on the one hand and deadly indifference on the other is at the root of it all.

and vast areas remain barren wastes? We are at the parting of the ways. One road leads to prosperity and the welfare of the public as a whole, the other to private gain and in the end destruction of our resources or monopolization of necessities of life with all that it implies. The question often arises: "Am I my brother's keeper?" How are we to answer it? There are duties and obligations imposed on us from which we cannot escape if we would. Every one, to a greater or less degree, is his brother's keeper, and this responsibility must be accepted. We come into this world, enjoy its blessings for a brief period, part the veil, and pass on. Is our life to be one of waste, selfishness and destruction, or one of usefulness to others as well as profit to ourselves?

We owe our state much. There are ways to serve it in the paths of peace as well as war. It is not so hard to be a hero with the fire of battle in your blood, the sound of martial music in the air, the eyes of thousands of kindred spirits on you, and the laurel wreath ready for your brow. But I think it would be conceded there is more happiness and less misery in the paths of peace than in the furrows of the cannon's wheel. While the glamour and excitement is lacking as an incentive, the service rendered more prosaic, it is none the less important. Every one can do something. Indeed, you would be surprised how much a very few sincere, unselfish men can accomplish. It is leaders of this type the people follow. President Roosevelt's popularity, his strength with the people, lies in the fact that they believe he is unselfishly devoted to their interests. They believe he has served them and is willing to serve, and because of this they made him the leader.

Personally I have unbounded faith in youth. It is then when the heart is freest of selfishness, when the world looks good, when hope abounds. From the loins of institutions such as this university and kindred schools will spring the future leaders of this commonwealth. It is to the young I carry this message of service, and it is through them this great problem will be worked out. I have reasons for my faith, for four of

the most uncompromising stalwart champions of this movement in the present legislature are sons of this university. May we be blessed with more like them.

In the university, in the public school, everywhere, if I could, I would have instilled into the minds of the youth their duties as citizens and their obligations to care for the future. What better time, what more appropriate place than this to pledge anew our loyalty to the people's cause, our devotion to our state.

One hundred years ago yesterday the immortal Lincoln first saw light, and during his eventful career as a public man his life was one long struggle for the rights of men as men. Through it all, to the day of his martyrdom, his devotion to his country's welfare never wavered, and when he died enshrined as a martyr in the hearts of his countrymen, the soul of one of the real great and good men of the world was taken into the bosom of God. Why is it that today his name is honored and revered throughout the land? Why is it that as time goes on his memory proves sweeter and dearer? Why is it he needs no monuments made of men's hands to commemorate his life and to keep his memory green? Service, my friends, service in the interest of the people as a whole. No one could do more than he, for he even gave up his life for his fellow man. Worn and weary, with every possible trial to face, every problem to solve, with the country a seething hell of war, his great heart literally bursting with anguish, without regard to his own comfort he served until the end. It is that great service the people honor. The servant became the leader. What think you—if Abraham Lincoln were with us today, on which side of this contest would he take his stand? Where the choice must be made between the public welfare, the good of the future, and the promotion of private interest and unconcern for the future, what course do you think Lincoln would advise if he could speak? Yet his spirit, his life, his memory, is with us and there can be no doubt as to the inspiration to be drawn therefrom.

fisheries, wild game, as well as other state resources, each in itself would furnish a subject for consideration on which volumes might be and have been written. It is not my purpose to go into details. The fact exists that we have these resources. The question is, shall they be conserved? Shall this conservation be for the benefit of the people as a whole, or shall it be for the individual? If the history of the past teaches us anything, if experience is to light our path, there can be but one answer to these questions. It would indeed take the imagination of a poet, with the instincts of a seer, to foretell what this Oregon of ours will be one hundred years hence under a wise use and conservation of her limitless natural wealth. The thought itself is an inspiration to aid in, and be a factor in, such a sublime work.

Consider the possibilities alone of the right use of water. Think of the vast empire in our arid section waiting but water's magic touch to transform it into happy homes for thousands of people. When one contemplates the possibilities in this direction alone it is inexplicable that there should be delays that try men's souls in securing legislation essential to enable enterprises to be inaugurated that will produce such results.

It has been said, and it is generally accepted as true, "that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together." If this is true, what shall be said of those who make grass grow where none grew before, who turn the desert into fields of clover, grain and fruit, who make vast sections not only fit for the habitation of man, but the fairest of lands and the choicest of homes?

Is it a matter of surprise that President Roosevelt looks upon the inauguration of this movement as the greatest act of his administration? It took a Roosevelt to inaugurate it, and it will take the same unselfish devotion to the public good that

inspired it to continue the work. I am not surprised that it has opponents as well as advocates. The stake is so great that it will require unyielding purpose and unflagging zeal to protect the wealth of the people against individual greed. The attack will be open in some places and secret in others, but those who put the interests of the public first will ever have to be on their guard.

Even now conservation is being attacked as though it meant non-use. Its friends are characterized as idealists, faddists and doctrinaires—as men who would prevent development, retard progress. Do not be alarmed by these charges. Do not be ashamed to have ideals and to strive to attain them. Eliminate idealism and you eliminate progress, and will at once revert to the grossest materialism. Every mistake is seized upon as proof positive that the work various departments have in charge is a failure. Congress, to show its contempt either for the work or those in charge, pays but slight attention to its needs or the recommendations of those who have studied it most. Those who have had special privileges, enjoyed advantages without cost (often at the expense of others and always at the expense of the public) are loudest in their outcries.

Conservation is the antithesis of waste. It does not mean non-use. It means a wise use. Instead of destroying, it would preserve. The movement will result in the greatest possible benefit to the people as a whole. It will make possible the use of our natural resources to the greatest number of people. It is a battle between special interests who would monopolize these resources in the interest of the few, and those who would have them controlled and used in the interest of the many. On which side of this conflict will Oregon take her stand? Is it to the interest of this state to have all her public resources absorbed by the few, or so handled that the people as a whole will receive the benefits? Shall we sit idly by and allow our magnificent water powers to be monopolized and their ownership and control pass from us forever? Shall our fisheries become extinct, our forests wasted, the springs of our rivers dried up,

We are commemorating the semi-centennial of the admission of this state into the Union. On tomorrow fifty years will have passed since Oregon was admitted into the great sisterhood of states which make this Union. This university proposes that hereafter on each recurring anniversary the day shall be set apart as "Commonwealth Day" and celebrated with appropriate exercises. On this day each year a rest and accounting will be had and an inventory taken of what has been done, and plans made for the future. Looking backward I presume fifty years does not seem a long time; looking ahead a half a century seems an eternity. What account will we be able to render fifty years hence? What will our inventory then show?

We have today within our limits all the natural advantages to make a happy, prosperous and contented people. How are we to treat this great trust?

In closing let me express the hope that I have said enough to cause some of my hearers to consider the subject seriously. I do not know that we of today are any less devoted to our country than were our forefathers. I do know, however, that they gave us a beautiful and fruitful land; that they made untold sacrifices and endured hardships of every kind in order that their children might enjoy the fruit of their labors. They handed over to us a rich heritage which their sacrifices made possible. Their ashes have again mingled with the land they loved so well and are now even a part of it. I know that men as brave, as self-sacrificing, as generous, as patriotic as they, never intended that the family patrimony should be dissipated, wasted and destroyed. We would not be true to their memories, true to ourselves, true to our country, if we, in turn, did not do all in our power to pass on to our children and their children forever the blessings which, through Divine Providence, we enjoy through the sacrifices, the sufferings and the love of those who have gone before.