

Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973)

## **Special Message to the Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty**

*given on February 8, 1965*

To the Congress of the United States:

For centuries Americans have drawn strength and inspiration from the beauty of our country. It would be a neglectful generation indeed, indifferent alike to the judgment of history and the command of principle, which failed to preserve and extend such a heritage for its descendants.

- 5 Yet the storm of modern change is threatening to blight and diminish in a few decades what has been cherished and protected for generations.

A growing population is swallowing up areas of natural beauty with its demands for living space, and is placing increased demand on our overburdened areas of recreation and pleasure.

- 10 The increasing tempo of urbanization and growth is already depriving many Americans of the right to live in decent surroundings. More of our people are crowding into cities and being cut off from nature. Cities themselves reach out into the countryside, destroying streams and trees and meadows as they go. A modern highway may wipe out the equivalent of a fifty acre park with every mile. And people move out from the city to get closer to nature only to find that nature has moved farther from them.

- 15 The modern technology, which has added much to our lives can also have a darker side. Its uncontrolled waste products are menacing the world we live in, our enjoyment and our health. The air we breathe, our water, our soil and wildlife, are being blighted by the poisons and chemicals which are the by-products of technology and industry. The skeletons of discarded cars litter the countryside. The same society which receives the rewards of technology, must, as a cooperating whole, take responsibility for control.

- 20 To deal with these new problems will require a new conservation. We must not only protect the countryside and save it from destruction, we must restore what has been destroyed and salvage the beauty and charm of our cities. Our conservation must be not just the classic conservation of protection and development, but a creative conservation of restoration and innovation. Its concern is not with nature alone, but with the total relation between man and the world around him. Its object is not just man's welfare but the dignity of man's spirit.

- 25 In this conservation the protection and enhancement of man's opportunity to be in contact with beauty must play a major role.

This means that beauty must not be just a holiday treat, but a part of our daily life. It means not just easy physical access, but equal social access for rich and poor, Negro and white, city dweller and farmer.

- 30 Beauty is not an easy thing to measure. It does not show up in the gross national product, in a weekly pay check, or in profit and loss statements. But these things are not ends in themselves. They are a road to satisfaction and pleasure and the good life. Beauty makes its own direct contribution to these final ends. Therefore it is one of the most important components of our true national income, not to be left out simply because statisticians cannot calculate its worth.

And some things we do know. Association with beauty can enlarge man's imagination and revive his spirit. Ugliness can demean the people who live among it. What a citizen sees every day is his America. If it is attractive it adds to the quality of his the life. If it is ugly it can degrade his existence.

- 35 Beauty has other immediate values. It adds to safety whether removing direct dangers to health or making highways less monotonous and dangerous. We also know that those who live in blighted and squalid conditions are more susceptible to anxieties and mental disease.

Ugliness is costly. It can be expensive to clean a soot smeared building, or to build new areas of recreation when the old landscape could have been preserved far more cheaply.

- 40 Certainly no one would hazard a national definition of beauty. But we do know that nature is nearly always beautiful. We do, for the most part, know what is ugly. And we can introduce, into all our planning, our programs, our building and our growth, a conscious and active concern for the values of beauty. If we do this then we can be successful in

preserving a beautiful America.

There is much the federal government can do, through a range of specific programs, and as a force for public  
45 education. But a beautiful America will require the effort of government at every level, of business, and of private  
groups. Above all it will require the concern and action of individual citizens, alert to danger, determined to improve  
the quality of their surroundings, resisting blight, demanding and building beauty for themselves and their children.

I am hopeful that we can summon such a national effort. For we have not chosen to have an ugly America. We have  
been careless, and often neglectful. But now that the danger is clear and the hour is late this people can place  
50 themselves in the path of a tide of blight which is often irreversible and always destructive.

The Congress and the Executive branch have each produced conservation giants in the past. During the 88th Congress  
it was legislative executive teamwork that brought progress. It is this same kind of partnership that will ensure our  
continued progress.

In that spirit as a beginning and stimulus I make the following proposals:

55 THE CITIES Thomas Jefferson wrote that communities "should be planned with an eye to the effect made upon the  
human spirit by being continually surrounded with a maximum of beauty."

We have often sadly neglected this advice in the modern American city. Yet this is where most of our people live. It is  
where the character of our young is formed. It is where American civilization will be increasingly concentrated in  
years to come.

60 Such a challenge will not be met with a few more parks or playgrounds. It requires attention to the architecture of  
building, the structure of our roads, preservation of historical buildings and monuments, careful planning of new  
suburbs. A concern for the enhancement of beauty must infuse every aspect of the growth and development of  
metropolitan areas. It must be a principal responsibility of local government, supported by active and concerned  
citizens.

65 Federal assistance can be a valuable stimulus and help to such local efforts.

I have recommended a community extension program which will bring the resources of the university to focus on  
problems of the community just as they have long been concerned with our rural areas. Among other things, this  
program will help provide training and technical assistance to aid in making our communities more attractive and  
vital. In addition, under the Housing Act of 1964, grants will be made to States for training of local governmental  
70 employees needed for community development. I am recommending a 1965 supplemental appropriation to implement  
this program.

We now have two programs which can be of special help in creating areas of recreation and beauty for our  
metropolitan area population: the Open Space Land Program, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

I have already proposed full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and directed the Secretary of the  
75 Interior to give priority attention to serving the needs of our growing urban population.

The primary purpose of the Open Space Program has been to help acquire and assure open spaces in urban areas. I  
propose a series of new matching grants for improving the natural beauty of urban open space.

The Open Space Program should be adequately financed, and broadened by permitting grants to be made to help city  
governments acquire and clear areas to create small parks, squares, pedestrian malls and playgrounds.

80 In addition I will request authority in this program for a matching program to cities for landscaping, installation of  
outdoor lights and benches, creating attractive cityscapes along roads and in business areas, and for other  
beautification purposes.

Our city parks have not, in many cases, realized their full potential as sources of pleasure and play. I recommend on a  
matching basis a series of federal demonstration projects in city parks to use the best thought and action to show how  
85 the appearance of these parks can better serve the people of our towns and metropolitan areas.

All of these programs should be operated on the same matching formula to avoid unnecessary competition among

programs and increase the possibility of cooperative effort. I will propose such a standard formula.

In a future message on the cities I will recommend other changes in our housing programs designed to strengthen the sense of community of which natural beauty is an important component.

90 In almost every part of the country citizens are rallying to save landmarks of beauty and history. The government must also do its share to assist these local efforts which have an important national purpose. We will encourage and support the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, chartered by Congress in 1949- I shall propose legislation to authorize supplementary grants to help local authorities acquire, develop and manage private properties for such purposes.

95 The Registry of National Historic Landmarks is a fine federal program with virtually no federal cost. I commend its work and the new wave of interest it has evoked in historical preservation.

THE COUNTRYSIDE Our present system of parks, seashores and recreation areas--monuments to the dedication and labor of far-sighted men--do not meet the needs of a growing population.

The full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund will be an important step in making this a Parks-for-  
100 America decade.

I propose to use this fund to acquire lands needed to establish:

--Assateague Island National Seashore, Maryland-Virginia

Tocks Island National Recreation Area, New Jersey-Pennsylvania

Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina

105 Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Michigan

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Indiana

Oregon Dunes National Seashore, Oregon

Great Basin National Park, Nevada

Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Texas

110 Spruce Knob, Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, West Virginia

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, Montana-Wyoming

Flaming Gorge National Recreation, Utah-Wyoming

Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area, California.

In addition, I have requested the Secretary of Interior, working with interested groups, to conduct a study on the  
115 desirability of establishing a Redwood National Park in California.

I will also recommend that we add prime outdoor recreation areas to our National Forest system, particularly in the populous East; and proceed on schedule with studies required to define and enlarge the Wilderness System established by the 88th Congress. We will also continue progress on our refuge system for migratory waterfowl.

Faulty strip and surface mining practices have left ugly scars which mar the beauty of the landscape in many of our  
120 States. I urge your strong support of the nationwide strip and surface mining study provided by the Appalachian Regional legislation, which will furnish the factual basis for a fair and reasonable approach to the correction of these past errors.

I am asking the Secretary of Agriculture to work with State and local organizations in developing a cooperative program for improving the beauty of the privately owned rural lands which comprise three-fourths of the Nation's  
125 area. Much can be done within existing Department of Agriculture programs without adding to cost.

The 28 million acres of land presently held and used by our Armed Services is an important part of our public estate. Many thousands of these acres will soon become surplus to military needs. Much of this land has great potential for outdoor recreation, wildlife, and conservation uses consistent with military requirements. This potential must be realized through the fullest application of multiple-use principles. To this end I have directed the Secretaries of  
130 Defense and Interior to conduct a "conservation inventory" of all surplus lands.

**HIGHWAYS** More than any country ours is an automobile society. For most Americans the automobile is a principal instrument of transportation, work, daily activity, recreation and pleasure. By making our roads highways to the enjoyment of nature and beauty we can greatly enrich the life of nearly all our people in city and countryside alike.

Our task is two-fold. First, to ensure that roads themselves are not destructive of nature and natural beauty. Second, to  
135 make our roads ways to recreation and pleasure.

I have asked the Secretary of Commerce to take a series of steps designed to meet this objective. This includes requiring landscaping on all federal interstate primary and urban highways, encouraging the construction of rest and recreation areas along highways, and the preservation of natural beauty adjacent to highway rights-of-way.

Our present highway law permits the use of up to 3% of all federal-aid funds to be used without matching for the  
140 preservation of natural beauty. This authority has not been used for the purpose intended by Congress. I will take steps, including recommended legislation if necessary, to make sure these funds are, in fact, used to enhance beauty along our highway system. This will dedicate substantial resources to this purpose.

I will also recommend that a portion of the funds now used for secondary roads be set aside in order to provide access to areas of rest and recreation and scenic beauty along our nation's roads, and for rerouting or construction of  
145 highways for scenic or parkway purposes.

The Recreation Advisory Council is now completing a study of the role which scenic roads and parkways should play in meeting our highway and recreation needs. After receiving the report, I will make appropriate recommendations.

The authority for the existing program of outdoor advertising control expires on June 30, 1965, and its provisions have not been effective in achieving the desired goal. Accordingly, I will recommend legislation to ensure effective control  
150 of billboards along our highways.

In addition, we need urgently to work towards the elimination or screening of unsightly, beauty-destroying junkyards and auto graveyards along our highways. To this end, I will also recommend necessary legislation to achieve effective control, including Federal assistance in appropriate cases where necessary.

I hope that, at all levels of government, our planners and builders will remember that highway beautification is more  
155 than a matter of planting trees or setting aside scenic areas. The roads themselves must reflect, in location and design, increased respect for the natural and social integrity and unity of the landscape and communities through Which they pass.

**RIVERS** Those who first settled this continent found much to marvel at. Nothing was a greater source of wonder and amazement than the power and majesty of American rivers. They occupy a central place in myth and legend, folklore  
160 and literature.

They were our first highways, and some remain among the most important. We have had to control their ravages, harness their power, and use their water to help make whole regions prosper.

Yet even this seemingly indestructible natural resource is in danger.

Through our pollution control programs we can do much to restore our rivers. We will continue to conserve the water  
165 and power for tomorrow's needs with well-planned reservoirs and power dams. But the time has also come to identify and preserve free flowing stretches of our great scenic rivers before growth and development make the beauty of the unspoiled waterway a memory.

To this end I will shortly send to the Congress a Bill to establish a National Wild Rivers System.

**THE POTOMAC** The river rich in history and memory which flows by our nation's capital should serve as a model of  
170 scenic and recreation values for the entire country. To meet this objective I am asking the Secretary of the Interior to

review the Potomac River basin development plan now under review by the Chief of Army Engineers, and to work with the affected States and local governments, the District of Columbia and interested federal agencies to prepare a program for my consideration.

A program must be devised which will:

- 175 a. Clean up the river and keep it clean, so it can be used for boating, swimming and fishing.
- b. Protect its natural beauties by the acquisition of scenic easements, zoning or other measures.
- c. Provide adequate recreational facilities, and
- d. Complete the presently authorized George Washington Memorial Parkway on both banks.

I hope action here will stimulate and inspire similar efforts by States and local governments on other urban rivers and waterfronts, such as the Hudson in New York. They are potentially the greatest single source of pleasure for those who live in most of our metropolitan areas.

TRAILS The forgotten outdoorsmen of today are those who like to walk, hike, ride horseback or bicycle. For them we must have trails as well as highways. Nor should motor vehicles be permitted to tyrannize the more leisurely human traffic.

185 Old and young alike can participate. Our doctors recommend and encourage such activity for fitness and fun.

I am requesting, therefore, that the Secretary of the Interior work with his colleagues in the federal government and with state and local leaders and recommend to me a cooperative program to encourage a national system of trails, building up the more than hundred thousand miles of trails in our National Forests and Parks.

There are many new and exciting trail projects underway across the land. In Arizona, a county has arranged for miles of irrigation canal banks to be used by riders and hikers. In Illinois, an abandoned railroad right of way is being developed as a "Prairie Path." In New Mexico utility rights of way are used as public trails.

As with so much of our quest for beauty and quality, each community has opportunities for action. We can and should have an abundance of trails for walking, cycling and horseback riding, in and close to our cities. In the back country we need to copy the great Appalachian Trail in all parts of America, and to make full use of rights of way and other public paths.

POLLUTION One aspect of the advance of civilization is the evolution of responsibility for disposal of waste. Over many generations society gradually developed techniques for this purpose. State and local governments, landlords and private citizens have been held responsible for ensuring that sewage and garbage did not menace health or contaminate the environment.

200 In the last few decades entire new categories of waste have come to plague and menace the American scene. These are the technological wastes--the by-products of growth, industry, agriculture, and science. We cannot wait for slow evolution over generations to deal with them.

Pollution is growing at a rapid rate. Some pollutants are known to be harmful to health, while the effect of others is uncertain and unknown. In some cases we can control pollution with a larger effort. For other forms of pollution we still do not have effective means of control.

Pollution destroys beauty and menaces health. It cuts down on efficiency, reduces property values and raises taxes.

The longer we wait to act, the greater the dangers and the larger the problem.

Large-scale pollution of air and waterways is no respecter of political boundaries, and its effects extend far beyond those who cause it.

210 Air pollution is no longer confined to isolated places. This generation has altered the composition of the atmosphere on a global scale through radioactive materials and a steady increase in carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels. Entire regional airsheds, crop plant environments, and river basins are heavy with noxious materials. Motor vehicles and home heating plants, municipal dumps and factories continually hurl pollutants into the air we breathe.

Each day almost 50,000 tons of unpleasant, and sometimes poisonous, sulfur dioxide are added to the atmosphere, and  
215 our automobiles produce almost 300,000 tons of other pollutants.

In Donora, Pennsylvania in 1948, and New York City in 1953 serious illness and some deaths were produced by sharp  
increases in air pollution. In New Orleans, epidemic outbreaks of asthmatic attacks are associated with air pollutants.  
Three-fourths of the eight million people in the Los Angeles area are annoyed by severe eye irritation much of the  
year. And our health authorities are increasingly concerned with the damaging effects of the continual breathing of  
220 polluted air by all our people in every city in the country.

In addition to its health effects, air pollution creates filth and gloom and depreciates property values of entire  
neighborhoods. The White House itself is being dirtied with soot from polluted air.

Every major river system is now polluted. Waterways that were once sources of pleasure and beauty and recreation  
are forbidden to human contact and objectionable to sight and smell. Furthermore, this pollution is costly, requiring  
225 expensive treatment for drinking water and inhibiting the operation and growth of industry.

In spite of the efforts and many accomplishments of the past, water pollution is spreading. And new kinds of problems  
are being added to the old:

--Waterborne viruses, particularly hepatitis, are replacing typhoid fever as a significant health hazard.

--Mass deaths of fish have occurred in rivers over-burdened with wastes.

230 --Some of our rivers contain chemicals which, in concentrated form, produce abnormalities in animals.

--Last summer 2,600 square miles of Lake Erie--over a quarter of the entire Lake--were almost without oxygen and  
unable to support life because of algae and plant growths, fed by pollution from cities and farms.

In many older cities storm drains and sanitary sewers are interconnected. As a result, mixtures of storm water and  
sanitary waste overflow during rains and discharge directly into streams, bypassing treatment works and causing  
235 heavy pollution.

In addition to our air and water we must, each and every day, dispose of a half billion pounds of solid waste. These  
wastes--from discarded cans to discarded automobiles--litter our country, harbor vermin, and menace our health.  
Inefficient and improper methods of disposal increase pollution of our air and streams.

Almost all these wastes and pollutions are the result of activities carried on for the benefit of man. A prime national  
240 goal must be an environment that is pleasing to the senses and healthy to live in.

Our Government is already doing much in this field. We have made significant progress. But more must be done.

#### Federal Government Activity

I am directing the heads of all agencies to improve measures to abate pollution caused by direct agency operation,  
contracts and cooperative agreements. Federal procurement practices must make sure that the Government equipment  
250 uses the most effective techniques for controlling pollution. The Administrator of General Services has already taken  
steps to assure that motor vehicles purchased by the Federal Government meet minimum standards of exhaust quality.

#### Clean Water

Enforcement authority must be strengthened to provide positive controls over the discharge of pollutants into our  
interstate or navigable waters. I recommend enactment of legislation to:

250 --Provide, through the setting of effective water quality standards, combined with a swift and effective enforcement  
procedure, a national program to prevent water pollution at its source rather than attempting to cure pollution after it  
occurs.

--Increase project grant ceilings and provide additional incentives for multi-municipal projects under the waste  
treatment facilities construction program.

255 --Increase the ceilings for grants to State water pollution control programs.

--Provide a new research, and demonstration construction program leading to the solution of problems caused by the mixing of storm water runoff and sanitary wastes.

The Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare will undertake an intensive program to dean up the Nation's most polluted rivers. With the cooperation of States and cities--using the tools of regulation, grant and incentives--we can  
260 bring the most serious problem of river pollution under control. We cannot afford to do less.

We will work with Canada to develop a pollution control program for the Great Lakes and other border waters.

Through an expanded program carried on by the Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare and Interior, we will continue to seek effective and economical methods for controlling pollution from acid mine drainage.

To improve the quality of our waters will require the fullest cooperation of our State and local governments. Working  
265 together, we can and will preserve and increase one of our most valuable national resources--clean water.

#### Clean Air

The enactment of the Clean Air Act in December of 1963 represented a long step forward in our ability to understand and control the difficult problem of air pollution. The 1966 Budget request of 24 million dollars is almost double the amount spent on air pollution programs in the year prior to its enactment.

270 In addition, the Clean Air Act should be improved to permit the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to investigate potential air pollution problems before pollution happens, rather than having to wait until the damage occurs, as is now the case, and to make recommendations leading to the prevention of such pollution.

One of the principal unchecked sources of air pollution is the automobile. I intend to institute discussions with industry officials and other interested groups leading to an effective elimination or substantial reduction of pollution  
275 from liquid fueled motor vehicles.

#### Solid Wastes

Continuing technological progress and improvement in methods of manufacture, packaging and marketing of consumer products has resulted in an ever mounting increase of discarded material. We need to seek better solutions to the disposal of these wastes. I recommend legislation to:

280 --Assist the States in developing comprehensive programs for some forms of solid waste disposal.

--Provide for research and demonstration projects leading to more effective methods for disposing of or salvaging solid wastes.

--Launch a concentrated attack on the accumulation of junk cars by increasing research in the Department of the Interior leading to use of metal from scrap cars where promising leads already exist.

#### 285 Pesticides

Pesticides may affect living organisms wherever they occur.

In order that we may better understand the effects of these compounds, I have included increased funds in the budget for use by the Secretaries of Agriculture, Interior, and Health, Education, and Welfare to increase their research efforts on pesticides so they can give special attention to the flow of pesticides through the environment; study the means by  
290 which pesticides break down and disappear in nature; and to keep a constant check on the level of pesticides in our water, air, soil and food supply.

I am recommending additional funds for the Secretary of Agriculture to reduce contamination from toxic chemicals through intensified research, regulatory control, and educational programs.

The Secretary of Agriculture will soon submit legislation to tighten control over the manufacture and use of  
295 agricultural chemicals, including licensing and factory inspection of manufacturers, clearly placing the burden of proof of safety on the proponent of the chemical rather than on the Government. Research Resources

Our needs for new knowledge and increasing application of existing knowledge demand a greater supply of trained

manpower and research resources.

A National Center for Environmental Health Sciences is being planned as a focal point for health research in this field.

300 In addition, the 1966 budget includes funds for the establishment of university institutes to conduct research and training in environmental pollution problems.

Legislation recommended in my message on health has been introduced to increase Federal support for specialized research facilities of a national or regional character. This proposal, aimed at health research needs generally, would assist in the solution of environmental health problems and I urge its passage.

305 We need legislation to provide to the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior authority for grants for research in environmental pollution control in their areas of responsibility. I have asked the Secretary of Interior to submit legislation to eliminate the ceiling on pesticide research.

#### Other Efforts

In addition to these needed actions, other proposals are undergoing active study.

310 I have directed the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, with the appropriate departments, to study the use of economic incentives as a technique to stimulate pollution prevention and abatement, and to recommend actions or legislation, if needed.

I have instructed the Director of the Bureau of the Budget and the Director of the Office of Science and Technology to explore the adequacy of the present organization of pollution control and research activities.

315 I have also asked the Director of the Office of Science and Technology and the Director of the Bureau of the Budget to recommend the best way in which the Federal government may direct efforts toward advancing our scientific understanding of natural plant and animal communities and their interaction with man and his activities.

The actions and proposals recommended in this message will take us a long way toward immediate reversal of the increase of pollutants in our environment. They will also give us time until new basic knowledge and trained

320 manpower provide opportunities for more dramatic gains in the future.

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE I intend to call a White House Conference on Natural Beauty to meet in mid-May of this year. Its chairman will be Mr. Laurance Rockefeller.

It is my hope that this Conference will produce new ideas and approaches for enhancing the beauty of America. Its scope will not be restricted to federal action. It will look for ways to help and encourage state and local governments, institutions and private citizens, in their own efforts. It can serve as a focal point for the large campaign of public

325 education which is needed to alert Americans to the danger to their natural heritage and to the need for action.

In addition to other subjects which this Conference will consider, I recommend the following subjects for discussion in depth:

--Automobile junkyards. I am convinced that analysis of the technology and economics can help produce a creative

330 solution to this vexing problem. The Bureau of Mines of the Interior Department can contribute technical advice to the conference, as can the scrap industry and the steel industry.

--Underground installation of utility transmission lines. Further research is badly needed to enable us to cope with this problem.

335 --The greatest single force that shapes the American landscape is private economic development. Our taxation policies should not penalize or discourage conservation and the preservation of beauty.

--Ways in which the Federal Government can, through information and technical assistance, help communities and states in their own programs of natural beauty.

--The possibilities of a national tree planting program carried on by government at every level, and private groups and citizens.

340 CONCLUSION In my thirty-three years of public life I have seen the American system move to conserve the natural



and human resources of our land.

TVA transformed an entire region that was "depressed." The rural electrification cooperatives brought electricity to lighten the burdens of rural America. We have seen the forests replanted by the CCC's, and watched Gifford Pinchot's sustained yield concept take hold on forestlands.

345 It is true that we have often been careless with our natural bounty. At times we have paid a heavy price for this neglect. But once our people were aroused to the danger, we have acted to preserve our resources for the enrichment of our country and the enjoyment of future generations.

The beauty of our land is a natural resource. Its preservation is linked to the inner prosperity of the human spirit.

350 The tradition of our past is equal to today's threat to that beauty. Our land will be attractive tomorrow only if we organize for action and rebuild and reclaim the beauty we inherited. Our stewardship will be judged by the foresight with which we carry out these programs. We must rescue our cities and countryside from blight with the same purpose and vigor with which, in other areas, we moved to save the forests and the soil.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

The White House

355 February 8, 1965  
(5260 words)

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