

Harry S. Truman (1884-1972)

Address on Conservation at the Dedication of Everglades National Park

given on December 6, 1947

Mr. Chairman Pennekamp, Mr. Secretary of the Interior, Governor Caldwell, Senator Holland, Senator Pepper, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen:

I can't tell you what a great pleasure it is to me to be with you today. You know, I have a White House down in Key West. It is very conveniently located for this occasion.

5 Not often in these demanding days are we able to lay aside the problems of the times, and turn to a project whose great value lies in the enrichment of the human spirit. Today we mark the achievement of another great conservation victory. We have permanently safeguarded an irreplaceable primitive area. We have assembled to dedicate to the use of all the people for all time, the Everglades National Park.

Here in Everglades City we have the atmosphere of this beautiful tropical area. Southeast of us lies the coast of the
10 Everglades Park, cut by islands and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico. Here are deep rivers, giant groves of colorful trees, prairie marshes, and a great many lakes and streams.

In this park we shall preserve tarpon and trout, pompano, bear, deer, crocodiles and alligators--and rare birds of great beauty. We shall protect hundreds of all kinds of wildlife which might otherwise soon be extinct.

The benefits our Nation will derive from this dedication will outlast the youngest of us. They will increase with the
15 passage of the years. Few actions could make a more lasting contribution to the enjoyment of the American people than the establishment of the Everglades National Park.

Our national park system is a dear expression of the idealism of the American people. Without regard for sectional rivalries or for party politics, the Nation has advanced constantly in the last 75 years in the protection of its natural beauties and wonders.

20 The success of our efforts to conserve the scenery and wildlife of the country can be measured in popular use. The national park system covers but a fraction of 1 percent of the area of the United States, but over 25 million of our fellow countrymen have visited our national parks within the last year. Each citizen returned to his home with a refreshed spirit and a greater appreciation of the majesty and beauty of our country.

These are the people's parks, owned by young and old, by those in the cities and those on the farms. Most of them are
25 ours today because there were Americans many years ago who exercised vision, patience, and unselfish devotion in the battle for conservation.

Each national park possesses qualities distinctive enough to make its preservation a matter of concern to the whole Nation. Certainly, this Everglades area has more than its share of features unique to these United States. Here are no
30 lofty peaks seeking the sky, no mighty glaciers or rushing streams wearing away the uplifted land. Here is land, tranquil in its quiet beauty, serving not as the source of water but as the last receiver of it. To its natural abundance we owe the spectacular plant and animal life that distinguishes this place from all others in the country.

Our park system also embraces such national shrines as Jamestown Island, the Statue of Liberty, and the battlefields of Yorktown and Gettysburg. These historic places--as much as the scenic areas--also need to be protected with all the
35 devotion at our command in these days when we are learning again the importance of an understanding loyalty to our national heritage.

Our parks are but one part of the national effort to conserve our natural resources. Upon these resources our life as a nation depends. Our high level of employment and our extraordinary production are being limited by scarcities in some items of our natural wealth. This is the time to develop and replenish our basic resources.

Conservation has been practiced for many decades and preached for many more, yet only in recent years has it
40 become plain that we cannot afford to conserve in a haphazard or piecemeal manner. No part of our conservation program can be slighted if we want to make full use of our resources and have full protection against future emergencies.

If we waste our minerals by careless mining and processing, we shall not be able to build the machinery to till the land. If we waste the forests by careless lumbering, we shall lack housing and construction materials for factory, farm, and mine. If we waste the water through failure to build hydroelectric plants, we shall burn our reserves of coal and oil needlessly. If we waste our soil through erosion and failure to replenish our fields, we shall destroy the source of our people's food.

Each conservation need is dependent upon the others. A slashed and burned forest brings erosion of the uplands and fills downstream reservoirs with silt so that water power is lessened and irrigated farms lose their water supplies. Eroded farmlands contribute to devastating floods. Uncontrolled rivers means lost electricity, farms without water, and perennial, increasing flood danger.

To maintain our natural wealth we must engage in full and complete conservation of all our resources.

Full conservation of our energy resources can be accomplished by continued construction of dams, hydroelectric plants, and transmission lines; by greater use of natural gas, by research for more efficient methods of extraction of coal and oil, and by exploration for new reserves.

In forests, conservation can be achieved by adhering to the principle of sustained yield and forest management so that timber is harvested each year just as other crops are. This should be true for both privately owned and publicly owned forest lands.

In farmland, conservation can be achieved by expanding and intensifying the many soil conservation practices developed by our agricultural technicians to sustain productivity. The area of irrigated land can be expanded materially by new reclamation projects. Range lands in the West can be protected by the control of erosion and by the enforcement of safe limits on the number of grazing stock.

In minerals, we can come closer to the proper balance with increased efficiency in extraction and with scientific exploration of new reserves. When ores contain several minerals, we should extract all the useful products and waste none. Despite a bounteous nature, this country has never been self sufficient in all minerals. We have always imported minerals to meet these deficiencies and we must continue to do so.

In water, we need to prevent further dropping of the water table, which in many areas is dangerously low. Surface water must be stored, and ground water used in such a way as to cause the least depletion. Although the water level is high now here in the Everglades, there has been damage from a lowered fresh-water table, and, during the war, fires raged through the glades--fires fed by dry grass which should have been covered by water.

The battle for conservation cannot be limited to the winning of new conquests. Like liberty itself, conservation must be fought for unceasingly to protect earlier victories. There are always plenty of hogs who are trying to get natural resources for their own personal benefit!

Public lands and parks, our forests and our mineral reserves, are subject to many destructive influences. We have to remain constantly vigilant to prevent raids by those who would selfishly exploit our common heritage for their private gain. Such raids on our natural resources are not examples of enterprise and initiative. They are attempts to take from all the people just for the benefit of a few.

As always in the past when the people's property has been threatened, men and women whose primary concern has been their country's welfare have risen to oppose these selfish attacks. We can be thankful for their efforts, as we can be grateful for the efforts of citizens, private groups, local governments, and the State of Florida which, joined in the common purpose, have made possible the establishment of the Everglades National Park.

The establishment of this park is an object lesson and an example to the entire Nation that sound conservation depends upon the joint endeavors of the people and their several governments. Responsibility is shared by town and State and the Federal Government, by societies and legislatures and all lovers of nature.

No man can know every element that makes a nation great. Certainly the lofty spirit of its people, the daily cooperation, the helpfulness of one citizen to another are elements. A nation's ability to provide a good living for its people in industry, in business, and on the farm is another. Intelligent recognition by its citizens of a nation's responsibility for world order, world peace, and world recovery is still another.

Wise use of our natural resources is the foundation of our effectiveness in all these efforts.

90 The problems of peace, like those of war, require courage and sustained effort. If we wish this Nation to remain prosperous, if we wish it still to be "the home of the free," we can have it so. But, if we fail to heed the lesson of other nations which have permitted their natural resources to be wasted and destroyed, then we shall reap a sorry harvest.

For conservation of the human spirit, we need places such as Everglades National Park where we may be more keenly aware of our Creator's infinitely varied, infinitely beautiful, and infinitely bountiful handiwork. Here we may draw
95 strength and peace of mind from our surroundings.

Here we can truly understand what that great Israelitist Psalmist meant when he sang: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside still waters; He restoreth my soul."

(1617 words)

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