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WILDLIFE POLICIES

Good stewardship of the world's plant and animal wildlife is a necessity for a healthy planet and to preserve for future generations the fullest opportunity to earn a living and enjoy a high quality of life. Too often we maximize short-term economic gains through activities not economically or environmentally sustainable, and in so doing we squander at an accelerating rate natural resources upon which life itself ultimately depends. Primarily because of the loss of wildlife habitat, species already are becoming extinct at the astonishing rate of 1/2% per year. Little wonder the Science Advisory Board to the Environmental Protection Agency ranks loss of species and their habitat as two of four highest risk threats to the environment and human welfare.

There is a worldwide crisis in wildlife conservation to which the U.S. government must respond with decisive leadership at home and abroad. The government needs to implement a domestic program which reverses the anti-wildlife policies and practices of the past 12 years. Good stewardship of our own wildlife and natural resources must again become a top priority. This will involve reform of our public lands management policies, development of programs to preserve our most species-rich and environmentally valuable lands and waterways, an expanded and more holistic effort to conserve all species of wildlife before they become endangered, review and reform of major spending and taxing initiatives which influence stewardship, and the development of cooperative relationships among federal, state, local, and private entities to design and implement regional conservation plans to maximize preservation of biological diversity.

Internationally, the U.S. government must discard the role of nay-sayer which it adopted at the Earth Summit, and once again assume the mantle of environmental leadership it once wore. Preserving and providing good stewardship of the world's wildlife - like the two other major environmental objectives of coping with the problems of ozone depletion and global warming -- can be accomplished only if nations work together in a cooperative and comprehensive manner. We must lead the way by ensuring that we do no avoidable harm to wildlife populations overseas, and by ensuring that strong wildlife conservation provisions are included in all significant international treaties and conventions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, and the protocols implementing the fledgling Convention on Global Biodiversity.

WILDLIFE BRIEFING PAPER

I. TOPIC/PROBLEM

There is a crisis in conservation of our plant and animal wildlife species, species upon which the future environmental and economic health of the world depends. The Bush administration's Science Advisory Board has warned that two of the four most serious risks to the environment and to human welfare are loss of species and loss of their habitat. But Bush has consistently supported policies maximizing short-term economic gain at the cost of poor stewardship of our and the world's valuable wildlife diversity.

II. HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

When the U.S. was young and thinly populated, it was a matter of practicality to promote westward expansion and economic development with policies rewarding individual entrepreneurship with minimal public regulation and maximum public subsidization. The overriding goal was to settle the country and promote growth. With our plant and animal wildlife so seemingly boundless, there was no recognition that ultimately these policies and subsidies would prove unsustainable, and that we would have to modify our practices to provide good stewardship of our wildlife and natural resources for our rapidly multiplying descendants.

Official conservation enlightenment began with Theodore Roosevelt who was a one-man revolution. Most of our significant public lands conservation programs started during his tenure. Afterward the cause of good stewardship advanced with fits and starts. Landmarks: migratory bird treaties and conservation acts 1916-36; creation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) under Kennedy; National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 with its Environmental Impact Statement requirements; the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973; and the Alaska Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

The Reagan Revolution rejected a stewardship role for government. Special-interest pleadings for unsustainable grazing, logging, mining and development on public lands were readily agreed to. Enforcement of conservation laws was lax, funding drastically reduced, and initiatives established under Carter were nixed.

Bush provided more of the same. He supported opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling. Funding for the LWCF and the ESA rose only slightly. His administration refused to protect listed species from misguided aid projects overseas, and undercut the ESA in court. It interfered with such EPA decisions as the regulatory definition of wetlands, and with career Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) professionals in ESA implementation, promoted non-sustainable logging of U.S. forests, declined to support FWS efforts to prevent species endangerment, and actively opposed a global treaty to preserve biological diversity.

III. CURRENT STATUS/RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

A. The Bush administration appealed their lower court loss on the ESA, and won when their Supreme Court ruled that defendants did not have standing to sue the government for its failure to apply the Sec. 7 consultative requirements to U.S. actions overseas.

B. The Quayle Competitiveness Council at first redefined wetlands so as to remove one-half of remaining wetlands from regulatory protection. The definition now is in limbo.

C. Secretary Lujan convened the "God Squad" to over-ride ESA Spotted Owl protection. It granted a limited exemption to permit 13 of 44 contested timber sales. Their ruling is tied up in court.

D. The basic authorization for the ESA requires reenactment, but Bush has failed to support reauthorization.

E. Bush proposed but lost legislation to open the Arctic coastal plain to oil drilling.

F. Interior has failed to list and recover numerous species which clearly warrant protection. One example: Their failure to list the Louisiana black bear (the "teddy bear") until sued. They then listed it as "threatened" but allowed logging to continue.

G. Bush weakened the biodiversity treaty and then rejected it while 153 other nations did sign. The President promised to "do better" than the treaty, but has not indicated any plans. But he's proposed weakening the Forest Service's biodiversity regulations.

H. A GATT panel ruled illegal a U.S. embargo on Mexican "dolphin unsafe" tuna. Numerous elected officials defended our embargo. Bush suggested legislation lifting our sanctions which provide protection against unfair trade for our tuna fleet and canneries, in exchange for mere promises from foreign countries.

I. Studies by the GAO and FWS established that on more than 60% of our national wildlife refuges there are "secondary uses" permitted which actually harm wildlife. Refuge reform legislation is supported by environmental groups. Bush opposes.

IV. MAJOR PREDICTABLE EVENTS

Major events unlikely. Others include: (A) An attack in Congress on ESA protection of the Spotted Owl. Bush will quietly side with anti-ESA forces. The battle will not divide along clearly partisan lines. (B) A bill to preserve habitat in California's huge Central Valley is bitterly opposed by agriculture interests and Senator John Seymour. There could be a Senate fight over the conference result. Bush may actively support Seymour.

V. KEY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

A. Conservation of Wildlife Plant and Animal Species.

Current wildlife conservation efforts center on two efforts.

1. Preservation of game species. Using recreation excise taxes, the FWS alone spends \$400 million per year for conservation of game species. This barely touches our conservation needs, as 92% of vertebrate species, and nearly all of the invertebrate wildlife species and plants, have no value as game. Surveys show a much greater number of Americans (135 million) enjoy viewing wildlife, than participates in hunting ~~and fishing~~ (15 million).

2. Protection of endangered species. For the vast majority of wildlife species, the only way to qualify for conservation assistance is to be listed under the ESA. This is one reason a growing number of species is becoming endangered. Once endangered the task of recovering them is much more difficult and the cost often prohibitively large. The predictable result is that we lose more and more valuable wildlife populations and species.

The solution, besides reauthorizing a strong ESA, is to greatly expand conservation for all species, and to begin the rescue effort when the chances for success are much greater and the costs -- direct and in terms of economic opportunity -- much lower. Elements should include:

1. Inventory current habitat areas still rich in species and therefore important to protect (be it by land acquisition, easement or agreement on public or private land management approaches). FWS has the capability to accomplish this with satellite imaging and mapping, but Bush has failed to provide meaningful support.

2. Overlay demographic and development trends, land management practices, etc., and develop regional or state conservation plans which protect the most significant habitat areas. This is a perfect opportunity for public/private partnerships, where public, private development and conservation interests cooperate to develop meaningful plans.

3. Develop a federal assistance program which assures federal land agency involvement, encourages state planning, and assists financing the land conservation effort. Financing sources, besides general fund appropriations, include tax check-offs, matching contributions to private grants, and dedicated excise taxes, user fees and energy royalties and taxes. (Subsidies for damaging resource extraction can be shifted to programs and jobs in conservation.) This conceivably could be accomplished through a reconstituted LWCF, but there is a firmly established approach to funding projects from that Fund, and existing proposals for expanding its purposes and funding with an emphasis on recreation.

4. Establish a serious federal program to provide conservation for all potentially imperiled species. It should consciously promote state wildlife diversity conservation planning,

cooperation between federal and state natural resource agencies, and direct state action. Funding sources are as in item 3.

B. Global Protection of Biological Diversity.

The crisis is deadly serious. There are approximately 1.4 million species currently identified, and while scientists vary in estimates of the total number of species, they agree we are eliminating species of life at a current but accelerating rate of 1/2% per year. By 2050 we could eliminate more than one-third of the species now on this planet. Ethical considerations (which are considerable) aside, the economic results of this loss in terms of malfunctioning ecosystems crucial to a healthy environment, of lost sources of future jobs, foods and medicines, is beyond description.

The world's scientific and political leaders are in general agreement with the Science Advisory Board's identification of loss of species, loss of natural habitat, ozone depletion and global warming as being the world's greatest environmental threats. We have witnessed the negotiation of four global treaties dealing with these same highest risk threats -- the Montreal (ozone) Protocol, which Bush signed only after unprecedented diplomatic pressure; the Global Climate Treaty which U.S. negotiators drastically weakened before signing; and the Global Biodiversity Convention which our negotiators seriously weakened but even then didn't sign.

The U.S. should do one of two things. We could sign the Convention and then make certain rules implementing it conform with our reasonable requirements. (~~Provisions provide it is not binding in its various parts unless there is~~ essentially unanimous agreement on the procedures controlling implementation.) Or we could forthrightly satisfy President Bush's pledge to "do better than the treaty" by laying out our plan. This almost inevitably would have the same result as option one. *Trudy requires*

C. Trade and the Conservation of Wildlife

Population growth and development, advances in transport and other forms of communication, and the approaching overload on the planet's natural systems, together mean -- as Senator Gore has said -- it is imperative that "the new world order" be one organized around preserving the life-sustaining qualities of our planet.

Wildlife is seriously impacted by the growth in trade in species, and by the continued loss of habitat stemming from growth accompanying trade expansion. The tuna problem with GATT (above) is an example of the former, and the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement of the latter. Administration policies are stuck in an earlier, less environmentally risky time. The U.S. cannot negotiate trade treaties based solely on economic considerations.

The U.S. government needs to speak forcefully on GATT. It must say that the U.S. will not sacrifice its sovereignty over environmental protection to an international trade panel.

The proposed NAFTA agreement is particularly significant as precedent setting because it would be the first free trade agreement between developed and developing countries.

Trade and economic growth on the one hand, and environmental protection on the other, are flip sides of the same coin. Sustainable economic growth can only come from a healthy environment. Free trade can help Mexico develop a sustainable economy that doesn't harm wildlife and degrade natural habitat. We should approve the agreement if it satisfies three principles.

First, U.S. environmental standards -- and our right to establish them -- must not be weakened. Second, trade provisions must facilitate mutual adoption of the most environmentally sound standards. Third, there must be a method of enforcing all signatory countries' environmental laws.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POLICY - Discussed throughout.

VII. LIKELY QUESTIONS AND DRAFT ANSWERS

1. How can we preserve our wildlife, our so-called biological diversity? or Do you support the Endangered Species Act?

Ans. We need a strong ESA. We should preserve life wherever we can, and many species can be future sources of jobs and medicine. If we are to be good stewards of wildlife and natural resources for our children, we must slow the astounding species extinction rate of 1/2% per year. But this will take more than a strong ESA. Otherwise we'll see an ever growing number of species become endangered, and the cost of rescuing them will be prohibitive.

We need to a program to help us conserve all species before they become endangered. We must identify our most important habitat areas, and determine priorities for preservation based on preventing endangerment. We need to encourage federal and state agencies, and development and conservation interests, to work together to prepare conservation plans. And we need to protect the priority areas by the most appropriate means -- land acquisition, conservation easements, and land management strategies consistent with conservation objectives.

2. Would you sign the Convention on Global Biodiversity?

Ans. Yes. President Bush's own Science Advisory Board said the four biggest threats to the environment and to human welfare are: loss of species, loss of their natural habitat, ozone depletion and global warming. Although George Bush fought against them, the U.S. has now signed international treaties dealing with ozone depletion and global warming. There is also a global biodiversity treaty dealing with the other two global environmental threats, but while 153 other nations have signed, inexplicably the U.S. has not.

We should sign the biodiversity treaty. There is a worldwide crisis in conservation, and in the interest of good stewardship of our resources for future generations we should sign. The treaty isn't perfect, but I agree with the rest of the world's industrial country leaders -- it can be fixed in the process of developing the rules for implementation. The U.S. needs to be a leader on the environment, not a nay-sayer.

3. What are our highest priority environmental problems?

Ans. I agree with George Bush's Science Advisory Board on what are the most serious environmental dangers ... it's too bad he doesn't. His Science Advisory Board has identified the four problems posing the greatest threats: loss of species, loss of their natural habitat, ozone depletion and global warming.

I would strengthen the treaties on ozone depletion and global warming that George Bush unwisely weakened and only reluctantly signed. And I would sign the Convention on Global Biodiversity that George Bush rejected even after weakening it. (See above.)

In addition, I'd pick up the ball George Bush dropped on major U.S. environmental laws. The authorizations for our Clean Water Act, Resource Conservation & Recovery Act and the Endangered Species Act have all expired. Our "environmental president" did not even propose new legislation or so much as agree to support reauthorization. And by the way, in the case of the one major bill he did agree to, the Clean Air Act, once it passed he assigned it to his so-called Competitiveness Council to gut.

4. Can we afford to conserve wildlife and provide a growing economy with an expanding number of jobs too?

Ans. There is no other acceptable approach. Our economy is built on the use of our natural resources wildlife. Economic growth that is sustainable is premised on a healthy environment. A healthy environment and a healthy economy are flip sides of the same coin.

There must be "no net loss of wetlands", and no net loss of jobs. Where conservation in the interest of good stewardship requires short-term economic adjustment, we need community employment to ease the transition to a sustainable local economy.

Finally, protecting the world's environment is not optional. It is necessary if we are to leave a healthy planet for future generations. Other world leaders know this and are moving forward to develop the technologies to provide environmental protection. The world's future jobs will go to the countries that show environmental leadership, not to those that oppose environmental protection advances as George Bush has consistently done.