



From Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism: Making the Shift

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PANEL PERSPECTIVES

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In an Age of Enlightenment Wildlife Comes First and Not Last

Chapter 1: Heal the Earth, Heal the Soul
Collected Essays on Wilderness, Politics and the Media
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When Russell E. Train, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, granted authority to spray DDT over 650,000 acres of the Pacific Northwest, presumably to prevent a tussock moth infestation, he relied principally upon scientific and economic data furnished by the Forest Service, an agency committed to commodity production rather than resource protection. Estimates of potential loss, without DDT control, were predicated on commercial timber values only. There was nothing substantive in Mr. Train's equation for the loss of birds, insects and fish, or for the impact on large mammals, or for long-term ecological disruption.

Likewise, when Rogers C. B. Morton, Secretary of the Interior, recently announced receipt of an application from the Alaskan Arctic Pipeline Company for a right-of-way permit across the North Slope, he welcomed it with a declaration that at last the North American Arctic would be unlocked, "its resources made available to meet human needs." Mr. Morton failed to mention, alas, that the Arctic Game Range, the largest, most inviolate wildlife sanctuary on this continent, will be violated. All the Pipeline Company wants – so they tell us – is to do a little boring for soil samples in surveying the pipeline route. As long experience has painfully demonstrated, the worst step is the first step. For this reason a similar proposal for test drillings in the Arctic Range was rejected several years ago. This time, however, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, an agency under Mr. Morton's control, issued the permit without a whimper.

These two happenings tell something about the priorities of modern society. Decisions in questions of land use are determined first and foremost on a basis of commercial values. Ethics, intellectuality, environment and wildlife are secondary. Wildlife comes in last. Every time. Little wonder that Secretary Morton overlooks mentioning the impending disaster hanging over the Arctic Game Range.

Everywhere in the country the land, the rivers, the estuaries and the offshore waters are treated only as commodities to be bought and sold, explored and exploited for material benefits only, never to be safeguarded by one generation as a sacred trust for the next generation to follow. One can find his own examples anywhere. If you examine the proposed superport project within the barrier islands near Port Aransas, Texas, fertile estuarine grass flats and marshes, a nursery and feeding ground for deep-sea fishes, would be destroyed. The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, home of the whooping crane, and a National Audubon refuge, would be endangered in order to make way for a turning basin, docking facilities, tank farms and related activities. All this to accommodate 250,000-ton tankers, whose spillage would be dumped directly in the bay and estuarine systems.

The same scenario is being written in the Four Corners of the Southwest; Northern Plains of Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas; Piceance Basin of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming; the Outer Continental Shelves of the

Pacific, Gulf and Atlantic. We are being pressed on all fronts by the economic-political power structure to exploit our last slender stocks of natural resources to the point of depletion without restraint. If this process continues, one designated sanctuary after another will fall. No park, refuge or even protected wilderness area will be safe.

The United States has led the way with our super-standards of affluence and waste. At this rate what can we expect to leave for the next century to use and enjoy? Regardless of how long the remaining resources may last, thoughtful people must challenge whether they should be tapped at all, and ask whether we might be losing something greater for the centuries than gaining for some brief instant of our own time.

We should leave the North American Arctic and other like areas undisturbed in order to fill deep human needs. Kinship with wildlife and plantlife contributes

to the humility we need in order to know ourselves as part of the community that is vaster than the community of humankind alone. The earth and its creatures must be loved and respected for their own sake. Otherwise, in due course the whole system of the utilization of resources will break down in collapse.

People who care must demand a reorder of priorities that will demonstrate before the world that ours is an idealist nation not wholly consumed by materialism and corporate greed. Who really runs America? It is time to assert new standards in which growth is not measured in commercial terms alone. Let growth be measured in individual compassion, sensitivity and appreciation of all life forms. Technological overkill of the past several decades has failed. The hour is right for a new age of human restraint and enlightenment.

Defenders of Wildlife, June 1974