

FROM CONFLICT TO UNDERSTANDING

FORGING A NEW COMMON GROUND FOR CONSERVATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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*Photo of the Idaho's
"Great Burn Area" in the
Clearwater National Forest.*

IT IS MY HONOR to share my thoughts with you - as a Professional Member of the Boone and Crockett Club and as Chief of the Forest Service - to renew the historic bond between the Forest Service and the Boone and Crockett Club.

I am proud to share the great conservation legacy of the Club, which has been a "keeper of the torch" for conservation. The Club, with its beginning in 1887, was among the Nation's first conservation organizations with early major credits in helping establish the Forest Reserves which were the forerunners of the National Forests, protection of Yellowstone National Park, establishment of wildlife protection laws, and advocacy for ethics of hunting and conservation. Later accomplishments included waterfowl protection, support for wildlife research and the wildlife refuge system, and the establishment of the "bible" for trophy records of North American big game. Many past members, including Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, Gifford Pinchot (the first Chief of the Forest Service), J.N. "Ding" Darling, and Aldo Leopold (who began his career with the Forest Service), are legends in American conservation. The Forest Service, the National Forests in its trust, and all Americans are the beneficiaries of this legacy. I thank you for that especially of behalf of the Forest Service.

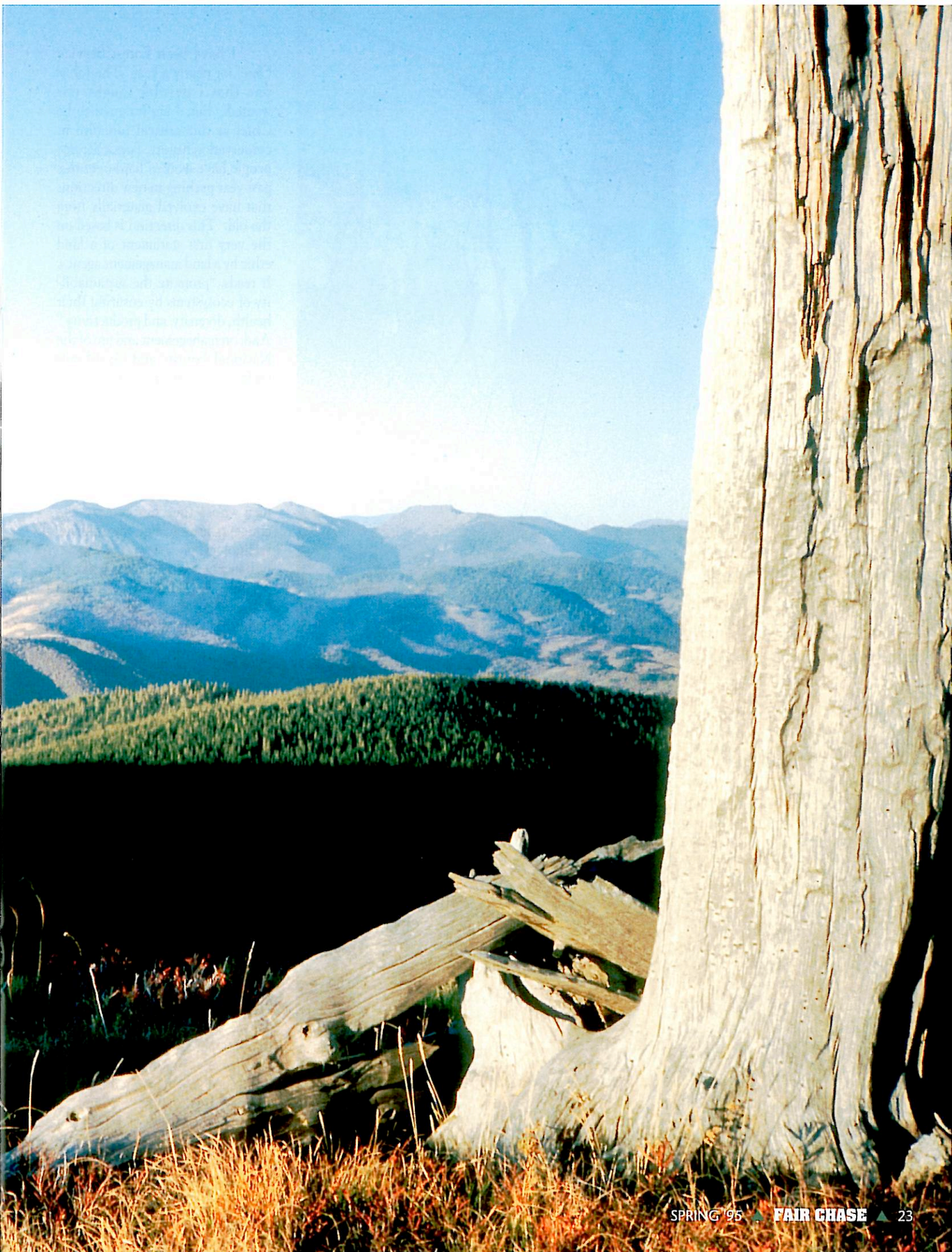




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I have been Forest Service Chief for nearly a year. The job is one that I neither sought nor wanted. But, I am honored to be Chief at this critical juncture in conservation history. Forest Service people have worked hard over this past year pushing in new directions that have evolved materially from the old. This direction is based on the very first statement of a land ethic by a land management agency. It reads, "promote the sustainability of ecosystems by ensuring their health, diversity, and productivity." And, on management and use of the National Forests and Grasslands tied to ecosystem principles. As you might expect, I've been dealing with the controversy associated with this change and the tension of folks who see themselves as potential losers, in the process of change.

Ecosystem management is an idea whose time has come. The concepts are old but the science, technology, philosophy, and sociopolitical situation now make it possible. Yet, I believe the English historian, Henry Thomas Buckle had it just right when he said, "every new truth which has ever been propounded has, for a time, caused mischief; it has produced discomfort and often times unhappiness; sometimes disturbing social and religious arrangements, and sometimes merely by the disruption of old and cherished associations of thoughts...and if the truth is very great as well as very new, the harm is serious."

I was to spend 21 years in La Grande — professionally exciting and personally rewarding years. I intended to finish out my career there.

Perhaps some of you know me from my work as leader of the Interagency Scientific Committee to Address the Conservation of the Northern Spotted Owl. That committee developed a scientifically credible conservation strategy for the species. You may know of my continued involvement in northwest forest issues, including leadership of a series of ad hoc teams that performed scientific analyses of resource conditions and options for management. These assignments

culminated in my chairmanship of the Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team (FEMAT) that produced an array of ten options for President Clinton's Management Plan for Federal Forests of the Pacific Northwest. This significant and difficult issue has been superficially portrayed and perceived as owls versus old growth, and jobs versus environment. This deflected understanding and appreciation of the real issues. That is, how do we use our natural resources so that all are sustainable, or how do we use the land without overspending our environmental capitals?

Aldo Leopold made the issue crystal clear - "The first precaution of intelligent tinkering is to save every cog and wheel." If, in our tinkering (using our natural resources) we carelessly throw away pieces, it is likely that - sooner or later - we could throw away the drive shaft. It is critical for us now to learn to husband our forest and range lands so that the beauty, integrity, and functions of those ecosystems are maintained century after century. This is no small task. And, it is, over the long term, the most critical task facing our kind as we increasingly exert dominion over the earth.

THE PROBLEM

This problem has broader dimensions. It is well to size up what is likely coming. There seems to be some things we should count on:

- The next two decades will be a time of significant world and national population and economic growth. International trade will increase significantly. World population seems likely to increase about 1 billion per decade. America's population will increase about 20 million per decade. This population growth coupled with economic growth will act in a synergistic fashion to up the pressure on natural resources.

- The remainder of this decade will see concern with and addressing of environmental issues or at least, as a strong undercurrent. Some see the recent elections as a step back from environmental con-

cerns. I think not. But, there will be demand for evolution of effectiveness. The "baby boom" generation will lead the nation from the mid 1990's to the mid-2010's. They are, and likely will remain in large part value driven, idealistic advocates. Pragmatic environmentalism will likely be a major part of their agenda. As leaders, they'll be strong activists and not quick to compromise.

The bottom line is that nearly all natural resources will become more scarce relative to demand. Simply, conservation must occur in the context of global and national economic growth structured to keep environmental transformation within safe limits. Since much of the slack will be out of the system, we will be dealing on the margins of both human and resource tolerances with ever-declining margins for error.

For all of us interested in conservation, and for Forest Service people in particular, these conditions intensify an old problem - how do we prepare for the likelihood of rapidly increasing human demands for wood, wildlife, minerals, clean water, grazing, and recreation over the next decades? How do we facilitate some inevitable level of economic growth, while simultaneously becoming more environmentally and ecologically aware, as well as sensitive and responsive to public desire and demands?

At present, the problem is already compelling and the signals from the public, politicians, law, and the courts are an increasingly volatile mixture. But this is also a time of "getting ready" or "getting fixed" as we say in the old country. The rest of the 1990's will likely be increasingly intense for those in the conservation business. Yet, the 1990's seem likely to be a time of relative calm before the storm of the early 21st century when it will become increasingly obvious that the time of reckoning has arrived.

THE SOLUTION

I am confident that we can begin dealing with effective solu-

tions to these tough problems in our own backyard. One such solution was described in the theme of the National Forest System Centennial - which the Club so generously helped the Forest Service celebrate in 1991. Thank you for that vision and generosity. The theme, you may recall, was "Learning from the Past for a New Perspective of Conservation in the Future." The theme acknowledged and honored the wisdom of three of the Forest Service's and the Nation's conservation heroes from the past:

- ▲ Aldo Leopold, who emphasized the importance of a land ethic and the significance of the application of ecology in land management and formatted the profession of wildlife management;

- ▲ Gifford Pinchot, who emphasized public service, the creation of the National Forest system, and the wise sustainable use of natural resources; and,

- ▲ Bob Marshall, who taught the importance of natural beauty and spiritual values of forests and was a seminal force in the establishment of a wilderness system.

When combined, the collective intelligence and philosophy of these great leaders can serve as the foundation for defining the levels and kinds of natural resource uses that are socially, economically, politically, and ecologically sustainable. We can visualize the collective wisdom of Leopold, Pinchot, and Marshall to resolve the sustainability issue. This can be done in two major steps:

1. Development of broad-scale, ecosystem-based management strategies, that are rooted in scientific knowledge and are ecologically, politically, and socially acceptable; and

2. Development of broad-based, regional forums that probe continuously for the common ground — the national consensus — for sustaining human uses and ecosystem form and function.

In January 1994, I signed, along with Jim Baca, then Director of the Bureau of Land Management, a letter directing that an ecosystem management framework and assess

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ment of factors pertinent to management be developed for lands administered by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management east of the Cascade Crest in Washington and Oregon, and within the interior Columbia River Basin, which includes Idaho, western Montana, and portions of Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada. This unprecedented action was taken because management of the public's resources requires new direction based on ecosystem concepts within the context and other ownership and human uses within the larger basin. This "breaking new ground" will result in a new management strategy setting the framework for local plans and decisions. This approach will:

- ▲ be based on concepts of ecosystem management;
- ▲ focus on maintaining or restoring the health of forest and aquatic ecosystems;
- ▲ be scientifically sound;
- ▲ consider the social, legal, economic, and political ramifications of proposed management approaches;
- ▲ be a multi-agency effort, that fully involves the public in an open process; and,
- ▲ be completed by the end of 1995.

This unprecedented effort has been in progress for nearly two years. I am confident this effort - the next evolutionary step to ecosystem management - will be an important step in the continuing process of evolving a set of standards that will provide reasonable estimates of safe environmental thresholds within which sustainable yields of goods and services can occur. I expect the adaptive management practices that result will provide constant mid-course corrections. I believe that if such an assessment and management strategy had been in place in the Pacific Northwest 10 years ago, the misnamed "spotted owl/old growth" issue could have been avoided. But, if we look back with the intent of learning and moving on, we can derive a better view of what the future can be. To look back

to seek scapegoats is both unfair and debilitating. Rather, we need to focus on the fact that the future is ahead and we want to intelligently do what we can to shape that future.

At least we can hope the Columbia River Basin Project may help avoid development of similar divisive debilitating issues in that broader, precious area. Within that area lies my home to which I will return when my sojourn as Chief is complete. I have special concern for the place and its people. It and they are part of me. My wife of 38 years is buried there. I think that this new step in conservation is in the tradition of Leopold, Pinchot, and Marshall. In it the journey they began continues.

There has been a festering and debilitating national crisis over the use of public forest and range lands. The friction in this increasingly acrimonious struggle has chewed up a number of very good, talented, and dedicated professionals. That is one of the reasons that I am Chief. And, that same fate probably awaits me. That seems to be the way of things.

But naming a new Chief has not solved the crisis - for who was Chief was not the root cause of the conflict. The deep polarization over how to manage - or not to manage - our natural resources issues continues and even deepens. This polarization creates the increasingly untenable situation within which public natural resources leaders and managers currently find themselves. And broad-scale, ecosystem-based assessments and plans in and of themselves won't solve the problem either. Only when public understanding, acceptance, and support for a common ground for sustaining use and ecosystems comes about will those managers and leaders be able to move ahead with vigor and confidence. Recent polls have told us that the American people want to be consulted about how their lands are managed. But, after all, they expect the Forest Service to lead. We intend, and are, doing just that with increasing vigor.

An October 1994 national survey was conducted for American

Forests to measure attitudes toward forest management and forest health issues. That poll indicated that the American public holds mixed views on forest management. They tended to believe that the Nation's forests are in reasonably good condition. About half were aware that the 1994 fire season was particularly severe. They tended to favor active forest management - including salvage of burned trees and thinning to improve forest health. But they were closely divided on issues such as harvesting timber from Federal forests, allowing logging in burned-over areas to be delayed by real challenges, and use of controlled fire.

And the survey showed important regional differences. Respondents who lived in the West were more aware of current problems and more favorable toward timber harvesting and human management of forests than those in the South and Midwest.

Gifford Pinchot drove home the point to the Forest Service that the best-intentioned and best-reasoned conservation plans would fail without public support. He encouraged his foresters to work as hard with the public and the press (we would say media today) as they did with resources. The Forest Service continues that tradition today, but development of consensus is elusive. Defining and standing on common ground is becoming increasingly difficult.

But, there is hope. The public and the professionals are beginning to weary of the extreme rhetoric from "the professional gladiators" whose interest is in the contest in the arena and not in consensus. From that weariness and the resulting impatience of those in political power there is, I believe, an atmosphere developing that can lead to that common ground, that consensus that has been missing for such a long and debilitating time. Almost surely the debate and the re-examination was healthy and was needed. But, now, a new need and a new day are coming. I can feel it. It is time. We must succeed in finding common ground in the public



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arena for sustaining both use and ecosystems. We, for the moment, seem to be without vision - and "without vision the people perish." But our vision is reforming anew and proceeding apace.

I believe that the solutions to the national crisis over use of public lands will be defined regionally and locally within the principles of ecosystem management. And, that implies that all who are concerned must be leaders in seeking for and defining the common ground for solutions to regional and local problems. Simply, the polemic debate over values (use versus preservation) must and will come to a conclusion. We must focus, as partners and as part of our democracy, on defining practical, regional, and local principles of management that can guide responsible shared resource use.

I noted the keen interest the intent in the Club's new strategic plan, "to participate in resolution of key natural resource conflicts through forums, symposia, workshops, and other appropriate means." I also am pleased with the

December 5, 1990, Master Memorandum of Understanding between the Club and the Forest Service, declaring the groups as partners to accomplish mutually beneficial projects and activities. I trust that such includes a joint search for common ground in the management of public land. A marvelous opportunity is developing as we consider the ecosystems in the Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada portions of the Columbia River Basin.

The Boone and Crockett Club has always squarely faced up to the key conservation challenges of the times. In 1887, the Club was one of a small handful of organizations seeking unity in conservation. Today, there are literally hundreds of conservation and environmental organizations. Many thrive on division and are threatened by unity. The conservation challenge of today is to bring about some consensus about natural resource management and a unity in resolving natural resources issues. I celebrate the Club as a partner in meeting this challenge. The Forest Service needs help in responsibly carrying out its

mission of "Caring for the Land and Serving People." We have extended our hand to the Club - in friendship and in a plea for help - and you have grasped that hand.

I believe there are grave risks to our precious public land ecosystems that should unify all who have been fighting over less serious issues. There are suggestions heard in Washington to "sell off" or "give away" these land that belong to us all. Such talk strikes at my heart and tears at my vitals. I was raised in a state with no public lands to speak of. I stepped into a National Forest for the first time when I was in my 30's. And, my life and view of and have never been the same since. This was my land. I was part owner and it stretched out before me and I could go where I liked without begging permission. It was my land and my children's land - and their children's children's land. No other nation has such a heritage. It is a heritage that is worth constant vigilance - and even a fight now and again. Surely, there is common ground there in those lights. In saying that I remain cognizant of the role that the Club played in putting the original Forest Reserves in place and role that a Club president name Gifford Pinchot played in putting the Forest Service in place. It is a proud heritage - for the Boone and Crockett Club and for the Forest Service.

I pledge the full power, knowledge, and influence of the Forest Service to work with the Club to explore ways of developing a sorely needed public unity based on the principles of land ethics, shared use, and ecosystem sustenance to reduce these risks. With this focus we can build on the dreams of the Club's founders to the lasting benefit of our children and the generations who follow. That, my friends, is a worthy challenge and a noble pursuit.

My Texan grandfather had a saying he applied to those few that he held in highest esteem. I too use the expression - and, as he did, rarely. I say it to the members of the Boone and Crockett Club, "you will do to ride the river with."

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