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MR. JAMES J. HILL

AT THE

NATIONAL CONSERVATION CONGRESS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

SEPTEMBER 5-9, 1910.

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MR. JAMES J. HILL

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NATIONAL CONSERVATION CONGRESS

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

SEPTEMBER 5-9, 1910

Every movement that affects permanently a nation's life passes through three stages. First it is the abstract idea, understood by few. Next it is the subject of agitation and earnest general discussion. Third, after it has won its way to a sure place in the national life, comes the era of practical adaptation. Mistakes and extravagances due to the enthusiasm of friends or the malice of enemies are corrected, details are fitted to actual needs, the divine idea is harnessed to the common needs of man. In this stage, which the conservation movement has now reached, the most difficult and important work must be done.

In our own history and in that of other nations we have seen this process many times repeated. Public education was an abstract idea in the time of Plato, a controversy of the Renaissance, and is still only partly realized. Back of all written records lived the man who first saw a vision of government universal, equal, free and just. But the world has not yet achieved the final adaptation of this mighty conception to man as we find him. Democracy is still in the fighting stage.

Only a few years have passed since it first dawned upon a people who had reveled in plenty for a century that the richest patrimony is not proof against constant and careless waste; that a nation of spenders must take thought for its morrow or come to poverty. The first actual conservation work of this government was done in forestry, following the example of European countries. It soon became evident that our mineral resources should receive equal though less urgent care. The supreme importance of conserving the most important resource of all, the wealth of the soil itself, was realized. In an address delivered four years ago this month before the Agricultural Society of this state, I first stated fully the problem that we have to meet and the method of its solution. With their great capacity for assimilating a new and valid thought, the people of this country were soon interested. Belief in a comprehensive system of conservation of all resources has now taken possession of the public mind. What remains to be done is that most difficult of all the tasks of statesmanship—the application of an accepted principle and making it conform in all its general outlines to the common good.

To pack the fact into a single statement, the need of the hour and the end to which this congress should devote itself is to conserve conservation. It has come into that peril which no great truth escapes,—the danger that lurks in the house of its friends. It has been used to forward that serious error of policy, the extension of the powers and activities of the national government at the expense of those of the states. The time is ripe and this occasion is most fitting for distinguishing between real and fanciful conservation, and for establishing a sound relation of means to ends.

We should first exclude certain activities that come only indirectly under the term, "conservation." The reclamation service is one. Its work is not preservation, but ultilization. The arid lands of this country have been where they now are, the streams have flowed past them uselessly ever since Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. Irrigation was practiced in prehistoric time. What we have to do is to bring modern methods to the aid of one of the oldest agricultural arts. It is mentioned here because its progress illustrates the dangers that beset conservation projects proper.

They are dangers inseparable from national control and conduct of affairs. The machine is too big and too distant; its operation is slow, cumbrous and costly. So slow is it that settlers are waiting in distress for water promised long ago. So faulty has been the adjustment of time and money that congress has had to authorize the issue of $20,000,000 of national obligations to complete projects still hanging in the air. So expensive is it that estimates have been exceeded again and again. The settler has had either to pay more than the cost figure he relied on or seek cheaper land in Canada. It costs the government from 50 per cent more to twice as much as it would private enterprise to put water on the land. Under the Lower Yellowstone project the charge is $42.50 per acre, and one dollar per acre annually for maintenance. The Sunnyside project carries a charge of $52 per acre, and 95 cents maintenance. Under the North Platte project the charge is $45 per acre, plus a maintenance charge not announced. These projects, in widely separated localities, entail a land charge prohibitive to the frontier settlers to provide homes for those for whom this work was believed to have been undertaken. The pioneer settler who can pay, even in ten annual instalments, from $3,500 to $4,000 for eighty acres of land, in addition to the yearly fee per acre, must have some other resources to aid him. The work of irrigation would have been more cheaply done if turned over to private enterprise or committed to the several states within which lie the lands to be reclaimed. This is not a criticism upon any individual. It is merely one more proof of the excessive cost of government work.

Toward the conservation of our mineral resources little can be done by federal action. The output is determined not by the mine owner, but by the consumer. The withdrawal of vast areas of supposed coal lands tends to increase price by restricting the area of possible supply. Nor can such deposits be utilized eventually except under some such system as is now employed. It is foolish to talk of leasing coal lands in small quantities in order to prevent monopoly. Mining must be carried on upon a large enough scale to be commercially possible. The lessee of a small area could not afford to instal the necessary machinery and provide means of transportation without charging for the product a prohibitory price. Under such conditions the coal would remain in the ground indefinitely. The people of the West see little practical difference between a resource withheld entirely from use and a resource dissipated or exhausted. They understand by conservation the most economical development and best care of resources. It is the only definition consistent with the natural growth of communities in the history of the civilized world.

The prairie states are more interested than any other in the question of cheap fuel. We do not depend upon Alaska for our future supply. There is abundant coal on the Pacific Coast nearer to our seaports and commercial centers. Vancouver Island is underlaid with it. To say nothing of Nova Scotia on the Eastern coast, there is coal in Spitzbergen, within the Arctic Circle, actually nearer our Eastern markets than the coal of Alaska. While we lament the exhaustion of our coal supply, we maintain a tariff that compels us to draw upon it continuously. It would be well to cast out this beam before we worry too much over the conservation mote.

The iron deposits of Minnesota, the most wonderful in the world, are to-day not only furnishing industry in the nation with its raw material but are piling up a school fund at home that is the envy of other states and adding more and more every year to the contents of the state's treasury. Minnesota is considering the reduction of her general tax levy by one half. Would it be better if these lands were today held idle and unproductive by the federal government, or worked only on leases whose proceeds went into the federal treasury and enabled congress to squander a few more millions in annual appropriations?

Against some forestry theories the West enters an even stronger plea. What the United States needs is neither reckless destruction nor an embargo upon our splendid Western commonwealths by locking up a considerable portion of their available area. There were, by the last report of the Forestry Service, over 194,500,000 acres withdrawn from use in our forest reserves on June 30, 1909. Of this, nearly 58 per cent, over 112,000,000 acres, or 175,000 square miles, lies in six Western states. That is an area six-sevenths the size of Germany or France. It is 80 per cent of the size of the unappropriated and unreserved land in those six states.

The forest reserves and the lands conveyed by congressional grants to private interests in Oregon amount to some 50,000 square miles. More than half the area of this great state has been withdrawn by action of the government in one way or another from cultivation and the enjoyment and profit of the people of the state. Over one-third of Idaho and 27 per cent of Washington are forest reserves. Colorado is almost as badly off; and not more than 30 per cent of its forest reserves is covered with merchantable timber, while about 40 per cent has no timber at all. On the Olympic peninsula are lands reported to be withdrawn to conserve our water supply where the annual rainfall amounts to something like seven to ten feet. According to the official report, the cost of administering the forest service in 1909 was a little short of three million dollars, and the receipts were eighteen hundred thousand. The deficit on current account alone was over $1,100,000. The total disbursements were over $4,400,000, and the actual deficit $2,600,000. The forestry service has over 2,000 employes. In 1909 they planted 611 acres and sowed 1,126 acres more. The West believes in forest preservation. But it believes practically and not theoretically. It realizes that a good thing may cost too much, and is not ignorant of the extravagant financial tendency of every federal department and bureau. It wants all good agricultural land open to the settler, wherever it may be situated. It wants timber resources conservatively utilized, and not wasted or destroyed.

In connection with forestry interests there is just now much question of the conservation of water power sites. The demand is that federal lands forming such sites should be withdrawn and leased for the profit and at the pleasure of the federal government. Against this the whole West rightly protests. The water power differs from the coal deposit in that it is not destroyed by use. It will do its undiminished work as long as the rains fall and the snows melt. Not the resource but the use of it is a proper subject for conservation and regulation. To withdraw these sources of potential wealth from present utilization is to take just so much from the industrial capital of the states in which they are situated.

The attempted federal control of water powers is illegal, because the use of the waters within a state is the property of the state and cannot be taken from it, and that the state may and actually does, in the case of Idaho for example, perfectly safeguard its water powers from monopoly and make them useful without extortion, has been shown conclusively by Senator Borah in a speech in the United States Senate in which this whole subject is admirably covered. Back in our history beyond the memory of most men now living there was the same controversy over the public domain. Ought it to be administered by the government and disposed of for its profit, or opened to the people and shared with the states? Let experience determine which was the better guardian. The worst scandals of state land misappropriation, and there were many, are insignificant when compared with the record of the nation. The total cash receipts of the federal government from the disposal of public and Indian lands from 1785 to 1909 were $423,451,673. The money is gone. It has been expended, wisely or unwisely, with other treasury receipts. It would be interesting to know how much the above sum exceeded the cost of administration. But certain limited areas of lands were conveyed to the states for educational purposes. The permanent common school funds, state and local, conserved by the states, amount to $246,943,349. The estimated value of productive school lands today is $138,851,634, and of unproductive $86,347,482. Add to these the land grant funds of colleges of agriculture and the mechanic arts, and the total is nearly half a billion dollars. To what magnitude these great funds, now jealously guarded, for educational purposes by the states, may grow in time we cannot even guess. Some may eventually provide amply for all educational needs of their states forever. This is one telling proof of the superior fidelity of the commonwealth as custodian of any trust for future generations.

There remains an opportunity and a need of conservation transcending in value all others combined. The soil is the ultimate employer of all industry and the greatest source of all wealth. It is the universal banker. Upon the maintenance unimpaired in quantity and quality of the tillable area of the country its whole future is conditioned. Four years ago, and on many occasions since, I presented the facts and statistics that make land conservation incomparably the paramount issue with all who have at heart the prosperity of our people and the permanence of our institutions. It is unnecessary to repeat in detail what has now become matter of common knowledge and is accessible to all. For the last ten years the average wheat yield in the United States was 14.1 bushels, while in Germany it was 28.7 and in the United Kingdom 32.6. This is a measure of our general agriculture. The cattle other than milch cows on farms in the United States are over 4,000,000 fewer than they were three years ago. The number of hogs declined 7,000,000 in the last three years and is less than it was twenty years ago. The increase in total value of food products is due to a great extent to higher prices. This failure to conserve soil fertility and maintain the agricultural interest is expressed in recent changes in our foreign trade. These are more than mere balance sheets; since, as you know, variations in international trade balances may produce wide-reaching effects upon all industry.

While our total foreign trade last year was only a little less than the high record made in 1907, the distribution of it was vastly different. For the last fiscal year our imports were nearly $246,000,000 in excess of those for the same period in 1909, and $363,000,000 above those of 1908. Our exports were more by $82,000,000 only than in 1909, and were nearly $116,000,000 less than in 1908. In 1908 the excess of exports over imports was $666,000,000; by 1910 it had fallen to $187,000,000. We are buying more lavishly and selling less because there is less that we can spare. A glance at the following table of our exports for the last five years in three great schedules dependent directly upon the soil tells the whole story:

	Breadstuffs	Meat and Dairy Products	Cattle, Sheep and Hogs
1906	$186,468,901	$210,990,065	$43,516,258
1907	184,120,702	202,392,508	35,617,074
1908	215,260,588	192,802,708	30,235,621
1909	159,929,221	166,521,949	18,556,736
1910................	133,191,330	130,632,783	12,456,109

With the exception of the increase in breadstuffs in 1907-8 caused by our desperate need to send something abroad that would bring in money to stay a panic, the decline is constant and enormous. A continuance of similar conditions, and no change is in sight, must mean partial food famine and hardship prices in the home market; an annual indebtedness abroad which, having no foodstuffs to spare, we must pay in cash; and financial depression and industrial misfortune because we have drawn too unwisely upon the soil. This impending misfortune only the conservation of a neglected soil, and all the interests connected with it can avert.

The saving feature of the situation is the interest already awakened in agricultural improvement; an interest which it should be the first object of this congress to deepen and preserve. Much has been done, but it is only a beginning. The experiment station, the demonstration farm, agricultural instruction in public schools, emphasis upon right cultivation, seed selection, and fertilization through the keeping of live stock are slowly increasing the agricultural product and raising the index of soil values. But the work moves more slowly than our needs. The possibilities are so great. One might make the comparison with current agriculture elsewhere almost at random, since European Russia is the only first-class country more backward than our own. Take the smallest and what might be supposed the least promising illustration.

Denmark's area is about twice that of Massachusetts. It is occupied by more than two and a half million people. This Jutland was originally land of inferior fertility. What has been done with it? Denmark is now called "the model farm of Europe." Her exports of horses, cattle, bacon and lard, butter and eggs amounted in 1908 to nearly $89,000,000. Mr. Frederic C. Howe, in a recent article, says: "The total export trade is approximately $380 for every farm, of which 133,000 of the 250,000 are of less than 13½ acres in extent, the average of all the farms being but 43 acres for the entire country. The export business alone amounts to nine dollars per acre, in addition to the domestic consumption, as well as the support of the farmer himself." One-half the population are depositors in the savings banks, with an average deposit of $154. How have these things been accomplished?

First, negatively, it has not been done by any artificial means or legislative hocus-pocus. No bounty and no subsidy has any share in the national prosperity. The ruler of the country is the small farmer. He cultivates his acres as we cultivate a garden. He raises everything that belongs to the land. He fertilizes it by using every ounce of material from his live stock and by purchasing more fertilizers when necessary. There are 42 high schools and 29 agricultural colleges in this little state, with a population less than that of Massachusetts in 1900. Whatever else they teach, agriculture is taught first, last and all the time, to young and old alike. The Dane is a farmer and is proud of it. England and Ireland and Germany are studying his methods today. No people could imitate them with more profit than our own.

Recent good years have brought the average wheat yield per acre in the United States up to over fourteen bushels. Twice that would be considered poor in Great Britain and an average crop in Germany. Therefore twenty-five bushels per acre is a reasonable possibility for us. Suppose we raised it. The present wheat acreage of the United States is about 46,500,000 acres on the average. If it gave 25 bushels per acre, the crop would amount to 1,162,500,000 bushels. At our present rate of production and consumption we may cease to be a wheat exporting nation within the next ten or fifteen years, perhaps earlier. With the larger yield we could supply all our own wants and have a surplus of 400,000,000 bushels for export. This is no fancy picture, but a statement of plain fact. Is there any other field where conservation could produce results so immense and so important? Is there any other where it bears so directly upon our economic future, the stability of our government, the well-being of our people?

Any survey of practical conservation would be imperfect if it omitted the almost desperate necessity at this time of conserving capital and credit. This subject deserves full and separate treatment. No more is possible here than to summarize some of the facts and conclusions presented by me to the conservation conference that assembled in this city a few months ago. Conservation of cash and credit is important to the farmer as it saves or wastes results of his work and his work furnishes the greater part of the nation's wealth. Our states, including cities and minor civil subdivisions, have run in debt about three quarters of a billion dollars in the last twelve years. Public expenditure is increasing everywhere. Public economy is a virtue either lost or despised. From 1890 to 1902 the aggregate expenditures of all the states increased 103 per cent. Boston's tax levy, says Brooks Adams in a late article, including this among the serious problems of modern civilization, was $3.20 per head in 1822, while now it is nearly $30. The per capita cost of maintaining the federal government was $2.14 in 1800, $4.75 in 1890, $6.39 in 1900 and $7.56 in 1908. The total appropriations voted by congress for the four years from 1892 to 1896 were $1,871,509,578. For the four years from 1904 to 1908 they were $3,842,203,577. An increase of $2,000,000,000 in expense for two four year periods with only eight years between them should give any people pause. Spendthrift man and spendthrift nation must face at last the same law and the same penalty. If any one believes that this growth of expenditure is a consequence of the general material growth of the country, let him study the following brief table of comparative statistics. It establishes the indictment of national extravagance:

Increases.

Wealth	1870 to 1890	116.0%	1890 to 1904	65.0%
Foreign Trade	1870 to 1890	99.0%	1890 to 1908	85.4%
Value Manufactured Prod.	1870 to 1890	121.0%	1890 to 1905	58.0%
Net Ordinary Exp. U. S. Govt.	1870 to 1890	1.4%	1890 to 1908	121.4%
Expenditures 30 States			1890 to 1909	201.6%

This debauch of capital and credit has sent a poison circulating through the veins of the nation. Everywhere the individual imitates the profligacy of his government. Industry and saving are at a discount. Any luxury, any extravagance is warranted if funds for it can be raised by wasting capital or creating debt. There is just so much less money for productive employment; for payrolls and the extension of commerce and industries and the creation of those new facilities for want of which the commerce of the country is and always must be limited. Hence come also high prices, curtailment of business, distrust and eventual distress. Hence come waste and idleness and the increased cost of production that makes both business and employment slow and insecure. Any conservation movement worthy of the name must place high upon its program the saving of capital and credit from the rapacious hands of socialist as well as monopolist. Extravagance is undermining the industry of this country as surely as the barbarians broke down and looted that mighty empire with whose civilization and progress Ferrero repeatedly insists that ours has so much in common.

We must stand for conservation everywhere; in the tedious as well as in the interesting application; where it cuts into our pleasures and habits and jostles our comfortable, easy-going ways of thought just as firmly as where it is hand in glove with self-interest. This is, above all things, an economic question. It is neither personal nor political. In such petty and partial interests it has found its worst obstructions and encountered its most serious reverses.

The tariff in some respects is a great enemy of conservation. Whatever we may think of it as a general industrial policy, every one can see that, by excluding the raw products of other countries, it throws the entire burden of their consumption upon our own resources and thus exhausts them unnecessarily. This appears clearly when we consider such commodities as we might obtain from Canada, a country that gained nearly 400,000 immigrants from the United States in the nine years up to April, 1909, and has probably taken another hundred thousand since; a country where it is absurd to talk about any actual advantage in the wage scale as compared with our own. The tariff on forest products cuts down our own forests, a tariff on coal depletes our mines, a tariff on any raw material forbids the conservation of similar natural resources here.

This congress announced from the first its purpose to deal with the subject of conservation in a practical spirit. The present condition of the movement, now in the third stage of its development, demands it. We have to apply the conservation principle, as we have eventually to apply every other, to our domestic economics; to work it out in the experience and practice of everyday life. How this may be done can be stated in the form of a few conclusions that raise the word conservation from the name of a more or less vague, diffuse and disputable theory to that of a practical guide to legislation and administration.

Conservation is wholly an economic, not in any sense a political principle. The nation has suffered and still suffers so much from transferring other economic questions to politics that the mistake should not be repeated. Whoever attempts to make conservation the bone of a personal controversy or the beast of burden to carry any faction into power or popularity is its worst enemy.

"Conservative" is the adjective corresponding to the noun "conservation." Any other attitude toward this movement, either radical or reactionary, is treason to its name and to its spirit. It should mean no more and no less than dealing with our resources in a spirit of intelligence, honesty, care for both the present and the future, and ordinary business common sense.

Conservation does not mean forbidding access to resources that could be made available for present use. It means the freest and largest development of them consistent with the public interest and without waste. A bag of gold buried in the earth is useless for any purpose. So is an acre untilled, a mine unopened, a forest that bars the way to homes and human happiness.

The determination in each case as to what extent a given resource should be utilized and how far reserved for the future is an intensely practical, individual, and above all it is a local question. It should be carefully considered in all its aspects by both nation and state, and should finally rest within lines determined by proper legislation, as far as may be under the control of local authority. Experience proves that resources are not only best administered but best protected from marauders by the home people who are most deeply interested and who are just as honest, just as patriotic and infinitely better informed on local conditions than the national government can possibly be. It is clear that every one of the many problems all over the country can be better understood where they are questions of the lives and happiness of those directly interested.

Behind this, as behind every great economic issue, stand moral issues. Shall we, on the one side, deny to ourselves and our children access to the same store of natural wealth by which we have won our own prosperity, or, on the other, leave it unprotected as in the past against the spoiler and the thief? Shall we abandon everything to centralized authority, going the way of every lost and ruined government in the history of the world, or meet our personal duty by personal labor through the organs of local self-government, not yet wholly atrophied by disuse? Shall we permit our single dependence for the future, the land, to be defertilized below the point of profitable cultivation and gradually abandoned, or devote our whole energy to the creation of an agriculture which will furnish wealth renewed even more rapidly than it can be exhausted? Shall we permit the continued increase of public expenditure and public debt until capital and credit have suffered in the same conflict that overthrew prosperous and happy nations in the past, or insist upon a return to honest and practicable economy? This is the battle of the ages, the old, familiar issue. Is there in the country that intelligence, that self-denial, that moral courage and that patriotic devotion which alone can bring us safely through?

I ask these questions not because there is any doubt of the answer in the minds of the American people, but that it may be made plain what a complex fabric the fates are weaving from the apparently commonplace happenings of our peaceful years, and how each generation and each epoch must render an account for the work of its own days. The unprecedented dignity of this assemblage, its national representative character, the presence here of those upon whom great occasions wait, the interest felt by millions who look to it for information and guidance, prove how deep beneath the surface lie the sources of its existence and its influence. Out of the conservation movement in its practical application to our common life may come wealth greater than could be won by the overthrow of kingdoms and the annexation of provinces; national prestige and individual well-being; the gift of broader mental horizons; and, best and most necessary of all, the quality of a national citizenship which has learned to rule its own spirit and to rise by the control of its own desires.

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