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Lands of Brighter Destiny: The Future of the Public Lands

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LANDS OF BRIGHTER DESTINY:
THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC LANDS

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Public Lands During the Remainder of the 20th Century:
Planning, Law, and Policy in the Federal Land Agencies

A Short Course Sponsored by the
Natural Resources Law Center
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June 8-10, 1987

The Lands of Brighter Destiny: The Future of the Public Lands

We can no longer afford to think about the "future" of our nation's natural resources in the abstract: the future is nothing more than the next moment in the blink of our eyes. It is the moment we describe, define and create by our actions, our policies, plans, thoughts, and also, unfortunately, by our inaction. To merely wonder what the future of our public lands will be is to remove ourselves from the simple equation of time:

Today + What I do (or don't do) Today = Tomorrow

Removing ourselves from this equation is an expensive cushion we use to relieve the burden of opportunity upon us. And removing ourselves makes tomorrow a cheap consolation prize because we don't use our greatest asset — our understanding of the vitalness of our natural resources to the world around us — to influence the decisions to build a sustainable resource base that is proud to behold for tomorrow.

As a starting point of thought and discussion about the future of the public lands, please consider the following questions:*

- What do you perceive to be the value of the public lands?
- What, in your personal opinion, is the best use of these lands?
- What is the purpose of the nation's (or the world's) natural resources in the future?
- Look one hundred years into the future. What is your vision of the public lands?
Simply, what is the view you would like to see if you looked out the window?
- From that position one hundred years hence, look back at our generation. How would you assess that which you create today as public land and natural resource policies? What will people in the future say about our management of their land? What would you change today?

The huge wealth of natural resources we have enjoyed in our nation has contributed greatly to our sense of wealth and well-being as a nation. But as we bask in this pride of ownership of so much — so much land, so much water, so much timber, minerals and energy — we

also gain an implied responsibility: our necessary participation in the process of creating tomorrow. The greatest threat to our public lands is simply our apathy as a people — or worse, our studied ignorance — toward the issues and the choices before us in natural resource policy. These choices determine the future of the public lands, and thus our future as a people.

This forethought and circumspection in the way we define our individual role when thinking about the future of our public lands is little more than an ethic about the value of the land itself. Last September, a varied group of people from resource managers to businessmen and ranchers gathered to discuss how we might approach an ethic as an expression of our accepting the responsibility of the future of our public lands. The text of the result of that meeting is contained in the Declaration for the Land on the next page.

An ethic, of course, is something we must live, while a declaration is a statement of our hopes and our intent as we work within our various professions. This is the necessary challenge facing us: to act, with all the enthusiasm and commitment we can find within ourselves for the benefit of the world of which we are a part. It is my hope that we can each seize this challenge, seeing in it the excitement of opportunity as we define the future of our public lands.

Elizabeth Darby Junkin

5/15/87

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*Questions and further discussion can be found in *Lands of Brighter Destiny: The Public Lands of the American West*, published by Fulcrum, Inc., Golden, Colorado 1986.

A Declaration for the Land

Land is environment. It is soil, water, air, life forms and the processes within which they interact. The Land is our only source of our food and water. It is habitat. The Land is not only a resource; it is the source.

We are at the threshold of choice — of opportunity, survival or extinction.

Now is the time to act, work, live, interact with the Land as if our lives depended on it, for they do.

- The environment is essential to both the existence and quality of life. Everything we do, have, enjoy in our world, and everything we hope for, is made possible because of the Land's continued support of us.
- As a result of our intellect and technology, we are now primarily responsible for the condition of the planetary environment. Deforestation, growing population, toxic chemicals and nuclear technologies cast the human relationship to the earth in a whole new light. Ethics, as a guideline for human conduct, has proven to be effective in regulating human relationships and could be effective in the human-to-Land relationship.
- Human needs can be balanced with the health of the environment. The convergence of human needs and the respect for the intrinsic worth of all life should lead to ethical use of the land.
- Life is a process. We are a part of it. Recognizing our individual and collective roles in the processes of the earth — to act with these goals and principles in mind as we interact with the Land — will assure sustenance for us all. It is for individuals to act with a sense of personal responsibility. Individual participation will lead to beneficial community action.
- We recognize that resources are not limitless. Satisfying today's needs should not compromise the ability of the Land to sustain us tomorrow. Consuming resources today, without providing for tomorrow, endangers the rights of future generations.
- Planning for the future of the Land is planning in partnership with the Land.
- All individuals, especially those with economic wealth or political power, should seek to determine and respect appropriate levels of impact upon the Land. Our actions should assure the sustainability of life on this planet.
- Inherent in this declaration is the simple reverence for all forms of life, their abundant diversity, and their continued capacity to change.

This is the necessary challenge facing us: to act, with all the enthusiasm and commitment we can find within ourselves for the benefit of the world of which we are a part. This declaration is a call to understanding, caring and acting. To live an ethical relationship with the Land is to participate with joy and hope in the future of life on earth.

October 11, 1986, The Home Ranch, Clark, Colorado

This declaration was prepared by 14 people from industry, ranching, agriculture, federal government, universities, international and national environmental and land preservation organizations, and journalism. For more information, contact:



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