

GENERAL SESSION

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very happy to be here with you today. It is a great honor and privilege for Tennessee to host this meeting of Southeastern Game and Fish Commissioners and I trust that your stay with us will be a pleasant one.

Tennessee in my judgment is an appropriate setting for a meeting to discuss ways in which our agencies can work to protect the environment and the wildlife in our various states. We are proud of the natural beauty of Tennessee and I think the show that autumn is putting on in our east Tennessee hills now is a perfect example of how beautiful nature can be and what an important and urgent job we have to protect the natural beauty of this earth. We are also proud of the abundant wildlife resources of our state. No one knows any better than you the magnitude of the task of protecting both the beautiful hills and streams and the wildlife that inhabits them.

Recently I was visited by a delegation whose heritage precedes our own. This delegation represented the Cherokee Indian Nation and its members sought our help in trying to save their family burial grounds. These burial grounds are rich in archeological knowledge but are deeply sacred to the descendants of those who are buried there. And they will be covered with the waters of The Little Tennessee River if the Tennessee Valley Authority is allowed to build the Tellico Dam. As I talked with these men, I felt deep concern for their wishes, their desire to preserve their sacred past.

As I thought of their concern for preserving the past, I also was thinking about the concerns of the future and man's need today to give a full measure of effort to preserve our valuable natural resources *not only for our present enjoyment and well-being but for that of generations yet to come.* We must never lose sight of what lies ahead and of the course we must take if we are to leave for posterity the kind of environmental heritage our pioneer fathers left for us.

We must devote time and energy in planning for the future. We cannot leave decisions concerning environmental protection to others. To defer planning and implementation of plans — especially in the resource management field — to another generation would court disaster. We have reached the end of the line as far as wanton disregard of our natural resources is concerned and we must continue to work out acceptable routes so that we may avoid the mistakes of the past and reach the goals we set for the future.

We will not have a second chance if we fail to make the right decisions and take the right action this time.

We will probably make our quota of mistakes, considering the frailties of the human clan, but I have the utmost faith that we will succeed. One of our greatest assets is the high caliber of men and women such as you who are engaged in the tasks attendant to conservation of our game and fish and who evidence vital interest in this problem through personal involvement. You are the leaders and through your determination, through the responsible leadership you are exercising, I'm confident we can look forward to continued improvements in wildlife management in the Southeast.

We are proud of your efforts and in my judgment your leadership is having great impact on the emergence of the south as a new force in mainstream America today. As Governor of Tennessee, I am particularly proud of the men and women of my own state, many of whom are here today, for their significant contributions in the protection of the habitat of both our wildlife and ourselves. They have been of great value to me in my fight to protect the Little Tennessee River, one of the finest trout streams in the Eastern United States, from needless damming. They have brought the U. S. Corps of Engineers to consider the value

of wildlife management lands in addition to the value of land to be cleared for agricultural purposes. They have espoused the cause of acquisition of lands for mitigating damages in conjunction with the Corps' channelization of the Obion and Forked Deer Rivers.

Our conservationists devised legislation to set up the country's first state scenic rivers system -- in effect placing a "Do Not Disturb" sign on our most beautiful, free-flowing waters. Our game and fish management people have instituted programs to retard the loss of wildlife habitat to the encroachment of civilization, and have worked to insure that public lands are made available for appropriate use of our Hunters and Fishermen and other outdoor recreational enthusiasts. Today Tennessee has more deer in her forests than at any time in the past, even before the white man came to clear the forests.

My administration has pushed for and has achieved legislation that governs strip mining activity and requires the immediate reclamation of these lands, and legislation to guard the state's waters and to eliminate the dangers and damage of pollution to both men and wildlife.

I am confident that your states have men and women with similar dedication, energy and foresight who are deeply interested in preserving the heritage of our natural environment.

I would be remiss if I did not pay special tribute to the hunters and fishermen who have played outstanding roles in the conservation of wildlife resources and through their contributions to wildlife management programs which are of significant benefit to all fish and wildlife, including non-game species.

Historically, the joint activities of hunting and fishing have been held in highest regard as a prime recreational activity. More important, the hunter and fisherman is the first to recognize the need to conserve and perpetuate our natural resources. With scarcely an exception, the most effective leaders in the fight to save our environment developed their dedication to the cause from their early outdoor experiences in hunting and fishing.

Perhaps the greatest contribution the hunter and fisherman makes is his financing of programs that promote the wise use of our natural resources. For many years, the only funds available to federal and state governments for conservation of natural resources have come from special taxes levied solely on hunters and fishermen. To date, some two and a half billion dollars in tax and license fees has been the sportsman's special financial contribution for the conservation of our natural resources. We are indeed indebted to these partners of ours in the area of conservation of our fish and game.

There is a challenge ahead for all of us, a serious challenge. We must meet our problems in this vital area head-on if we are to resolve them in an effective manner. We must continue to be willing to stand up and be counted, to question, to prod, to entreat and to fight when necessary against those who would ravage nature.

The key to success in the future is planning. We cannot, for example, allow ecological and economic disasters such as that which occurred two years ago when mercury pollution from industrial discharges forced the closing of Pickwick Lake here in Tennessee to fishing. We must plan for the future, anticipate and counter the dangers and challenges, and present positive, well-thought-out, technically sound programs for environmental protection and resource management to our legislative bodies for authorization and funding.

By following this course of action, I believe we can save much of our present valuable wildlife resource, re-establish it in many areas, protect our present fisheries and reclaim our polluted lakes and rivers.

The survival of our wildlife and perhaps even the lives of our own descendants depends on our success in meeting this challenge. We cannot afford to sit this one out.