

179. James Watt, "Environmentalists: A Threat to the Ecology of the West" (1978)

Source: James Watt: "Environmentalists: A Threat to the Ecology of the West," speech at the Conservation Foundation, Dallas, May 8, 1978. We have made diligent efforts to contact the copyright holder to obtain permission to reprint this selection. If you have information that would help us, please write to Permissions Department, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110.

The rapid growth of the environmentalist movement sparked a conservative reaction. New environmental regulations led to calls for less government intervention in the economy. These were most strident in the West, where measures to protect the environment threatened irrigation projects and private access to public lands. Using the language of freedom from government tyranny, western leaders denounced control of large areas of land by the Bureau of Land Management in Washington, D.C., and insisted that decision-making power over issues like grazing rights, mining development, and whether public lands should be closed to fishing and hunting be given to the states. Conservative westerners like James Watt, later secretary of the interior under President Reagan, insisted that environmentalism threatened to prevent the development of the West's energy resources and therefore would damage the national economy as a whole.

IN RECENT YEARS, the unique life style of the West has been challenged. The nation has demanded from our states additional supplies of coal, oil and gas, uranium, forest products, and food and fiber.

Because of good leadership and the rugged individualism of our citizens, the states of the West have accommodated the new pressures. We have struggled, and with but a few exceptions, have been able to protect our natural environment while the increased demands have been met. . . .

But now, all this is being threatened.

Today, there is a new political force in the land—a small group of extremists who don't concern themselves with a balanced perspective or a concern about improving the quality of life for mankind—they are called the environmentalists. Unlike the conservationists, they are single-minded and appear to be determined to accomplish their objectives at whatever cost to society....

The energy resources of the West are and will be the cornerstone of our future energy needs. There is no other major domestic energy resource base for the Nation.... These energy resources will be developed. The only question remaining is, when? Will it be orderly and phased-in over time with proper environmental safeguards? Or, will it be explosively developed, fired by a political-economic crisis....?

My thesis is that because of the actions being taken by extremists to delay or stop the orderly development of energy resources... the Nation is likely to suffer energy shortages and thus severe economic hardship.... When this happens, whether triggered by an Arab oil boycott, or slowly through time, the politicians in Washington will seize on the crisis and take whatever energy is necessary to extract energy from the Western states, in order to light and heat the East and to maintain jobs in the Midwest and on the East coast. The cost of taking our energy resources in a crisis atmosphere could be the ravaging of our land and the destruction of our natural resources....

I fear for our ecology in the West and for our lifestyle. When the economic pressures start strangling the Eastern states due to short supplies of energy, their political leadership will come after our resources. In the minds of the affected job holders, no price will be too great (including the destruction of the ecology of the West), to get the necessary energy resources to keep their homes heated and their employment secure....

What is the real motive of these extreme environmentalists? Is it to simply protect the environment? Is it to delay and deny energy development? Is it to weaken America?...

I am a concerned Westerner.... Today, the extremists—the environmentalists—are fighting this needed orderly development.

I fear that our states may be ravaged as a result of the actions of the environmentalists—the greatest threat to the ecology of the West.

Questions

1. What does Watt see as the hidden motive of the environmentalist movement?
 2. How does he argue that environmentalism actually threatens the natural environment in the West?
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180. Ronald Reagan, Inaugural Address (1981)

Source: Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981, Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1981 (Washington, D.C., 1982), pp. 1–3.

Riding a wave of dissatisfaction with the country's economic problems and apparently diminished strength in world affairs, Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980. An excellent public speaker, Reagan reshaped the nation's agenda and political language more effectively than any other president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. He made conservatism seem progressive, rather than an attempt to turn back the tide of progress. His inaugural address reflected how he made freedom the watchword of what came to be called the Reagan Revolution—an effort to scale back the scope of government, lower taxes, and reinvigorate the Cold War. He ended by invoking the time-honored idea that the United States has a mission to serve as a “beacon” of freedom for people throughout the world.

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