

A Letter From the Secretary

As we continue the inevitable march toward the 21st Century, I feel it important to review the successes of the past few years to help maintain our momentum. We continue to streamline the way the Department of the Interior does business while fulfilling our land management and resource protection responsibilities. As the Nation's principal conservation agency, we have special responsibilities to use our resources to benefit the American people and preserve the enormous heritage of this country.

In 1996, after 85 years of invaluable service to the Nation, the U.S. Bureau of Mines was closed. Over the years, Bureau employees made major contributions to the economic, environmental, military, and industrial strength of our country through a variety of new technologies and mining methods and equipment. As we noted at the Bureau's closing ceremonies, the employees of the U.S. Bureau of Mines have every reason to be proud of their 85-year legacy of service to our Nation, and their outstanding work and accomplishments will continue to benefit generations of Americans long after its doors are closed.



During 1996, the Department managed our natural resources for the benefit of this and future generations, continued to work in partnerships with Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives, and provided sound science for the decisions we faced. I am particularly proud of the relationships that we have built as we carried out specific initiatives during the year.

In South Florida, we have broken down barriers between the State of Florida, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and various other Federal, State, tribal and local interested parties. With all points of view being considered, the massive effort to restore the Everglades is proceeding, but much remains to be done. The recent purchase of 1,233 acres in the Everglades Agricultural Area with Fiscal Year 1997 Farm Bill funds is the first step in an ongoing partnership with the South Florida Water Management District. Over the next seven years, Federal investment in the Everglades is expected to reach \$1.5 billion as 100,000 acres are acquired to help return the natural flow of water through the River of Grass into Florida Bay. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force serves as a model for inter-government cooperation, and the Department is proud to be a leader in this effort.

While cooperation among governments has increased effectiveness and reduced unnecessary regulation, it is no substitute for interaction with the public. Looking to local communities for guidance has led the Bureau of Land Management to form 24 Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) in the Western States. RACs are citizen-based groups that advise the Bureau on standards of rangeland health and guidelines for other land management issues. Each RAC consists of 12 to 15 members from diverse interests in local communities, including ranchers, environmental groups, tribes, State and local government officials, academia, and other public land users. Again, by getting all opinions out in full view, the councils have made progress on issues of longstanding concern and show great promise for the future of public land management.

Working with local communities is the key to making the Endangered Species Act work, and I am fully committed to that effort. In the Rockies, the reintroduction of the grey wolf has been an unprecedented success. In the Pacific Northwest and California, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has forged strong partnerships through Habitat Conservation Plans with State, local, and private landowners to find endangered species habitat solutions that are biologically and economically feasible to all parties. This new approach limits the Federal oversight role and leaves more of the economic planning and development to the local affected parties. At the same time, habitats are

maintained through proper use of the most biologically important land. By keeping this land undeveloped, endangered species are given a place to thrive and property values are increased by preserving the beautiful lay of the land.

In the South, the red-cockaded woodpecker is being protected through partnerships with State and local governments, private business, and the military. At Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, the rare bird peacefully co-exists with an understanding Second Marine Division. The Marines maneuver around the birds and trees as they would any other obstacle, and the birds do not mind the noise of Amphibious Assault Vehicles, as long as they have the old growth nesting trees and enough space to forage. Working with the military across the country has produced many opportunities for protection of natural resources as military bases are converted to non-military use. Recently, historic Midway Island was transferred from the Navy to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a wildlife refuge. We look forward to other partnership opportunities with the military, including conversion of military property to State and local parks through the National Park Service's Federal Lands to Parks Program and transfer of closed military housing to tribes through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

A partnership between the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Indian Education programs, major private telecommunications companies, software firms, and Departmental offices is reengineering the telecommunications and computer technology infrastructure serving BIA schools and Indian communities. This effort will enhance learning opportunities for students, teachers, parents and entire communities. More than 50,000 American Indian children in 23 States will see a direct benefit from this program.

The cooperation does not end with State, local and tribal governments. For the past three years, the Department has been working with a field coordinating committee on land management issues affecting the U.S.-Mexico border. Spurred by the North American Free Trade Agreement, this partnership is producing a digital mapping database that will be used by land managers on both sides of the border in making resource management decisions. As development in this mostly arid region continues to expand, the partnerships that are being forged right now will become an invaluable asset.

All across the country, the Department of the Interior is working with State and local governments and listening to local residents to better manage and protect our Nation's natural resources. We recognize that public lands belong to the public, and we have done our best in the past few years to avoid litigation by discussing local issues with local residents. The President's Northwest Forest Plan is just one example. Critical wildlife species are receiving the protection they deserve but not at the cost of destroying the local economy. From 1994 to 1996, more than 1.7 billion board feet of timber have been offered for sale from Federal forest lands in Washington, Oregon and Northern California. The Department will continue this innovative approach to environmental protection based on key watersheds and valuable old growth forests and preserves.

In the past year, this Administration has taken several high profile resource protection stands. We took steps to protect unique stands of old-growth redwoods in the Headwaters Forest in California and protected Yellowstone National Park from mining just outside its border. And on September 18, 1996, I stood with the President as he established the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument by executive order, thereby protecting 1.7 million acres of Utah's stark and beautiful stone canyons. In the next four years, we intend to continue the trend of decisive action and innovative management of our natural resources. But we can only maintain our momentum by listening to our customers. Without the support of those who use the public lands, we can accomplish little.



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