Introduction to Carter’s “The Environment Message to the Congress.”

May 23, 1977

To the Congress of the United States:

This message brings together a great variety of programs. It deals not only with ways to preserve the wilderness, wildlife, and natural and historical resources which are a beautiful and valued part of America's national heritage; it deals also with the effects of pollution, toxic chemicals, and the damage caused by the demand for energy. Each of these concerns, in its own way, affects the environment; and together they underscore the importance of environmental protection in all our lives.

Americans long thought that nature could take care of itself--or that if it did not, the consequences were someone else's problem. As we know now, that assumption was wrong; none of us is a stranger to environmental problems.

Industrial workers, for example, are exposed to disproportionate risks from toxic substances in their surroundings. The urban poor, many of whom have never had the chance to canoe a river or hike a mountain trail, must nevertheless endure each day the hazardous effects of lead and other pollutants in the air.

I believe environmental protection is consistent with a sound economy. Previous pollution control laws have generated many more jobs than they have cost. And other environmental measures whose time has come--measures like energy conservation, reclamation of strip-mined lands, and rehabilitation of our cities--will produce still more new jobs, often where they are needed most. In any event, if we ignore the care of our environment, the day will eventually come when our economy suffers for that neglect.

Intelligent stewardship of the environment on behalf of all Americans is a prime responsibility of government. Congress has in the past carried out its share of this duty well--so well, in fact, that the primary need today is not for new comprehensive statutes but for sensitive administration and energetic enforcement of the ones we have. Environmental protection is no longer just a legislative job, but one that requires--and will now receive--firm and unsparing support from the Executive Branch.

In this spirit, I am presenting the following program to build upon Congress' admirable record:

Actions to control pollution and protect health
• A coordinated attack on toxic chemicals in the environment
• Effective implementation of the Toxic Substances Control Act
• Accelerated development of occupational health standards to protect workers
• Strong legislation to improve air quality
• A $45 billion, 10-year program to build sewage facilities
• Accelerated study of economic incentives to encourage recycling
Actions to assure environmentally sound energy development

• Support for amendments to improve the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act
• Revision of the OCS leasing schedule
• More participation by states in the current OCS program
• Accelerated identification of health and environmental effects of new energy technologies
• A nationwide evaluation of the availability of water for energy development
• Support for strong national strip-mining legislation
• Reform of the federal coal leasing program

Actions to improve the urban environment

• Commitment to neighborhood preservation and conservation
• Use of historic buildings for federal offices where appropriate
• An improved and expanded urban homesteading program

Actions to protect our natural resources

• A comprehensive review of water resources policy
• Executive Orders to direct federal agencies to refrain from supporting development in floodplains and wetlands
• Support for the program regulating dredge spoil disposal in wetlands
• $50 million over the next five years to purchase wetlands to protect waterfowl habitat
• Development of legislation to replace the anachronistic Mining Law of 1872 with one that establishes a leasing system for hard rock minerals
• A comprehensive review of the Cooperative Forestry Program
• An Executive Order-strengthening protection of public lands from the uncontrolled use of off-road vehicles

Actions to preserve our national heritage

• An accelerated five-year, $759 million program to develop new and existing parks
• Development of legislation to establish a National Heritage Trust to protect places of cultural, historic, and ecological value
• Support for designating major additions to the Park, Forest, Wildlife Refuge and Wild and Scenic River Systems in Alaska
• Four new wilderness proposals and enlargement of five others submitted by previous Administrations
• Accelerated preparation of new wilderness proposals for Alaska and the East and initiation of a vigorous new wilderness program on Bureau of Land Management lands

• Eight new Wild and Scenic Rivers and proposals to study 20 others
• Legislation to deauthorize the Cross Florida Barge Canal and to study adding the Oklawaha River to the Wild and Scenic River System
• Three new National Scenic Trails
Actions to protect wildlife

• A $295 million five-year program to rehabilitate and improve the Wildlife Refuge System
• Improved protection for nongame wildlife
• An accelerated effort to identify habitat critical to the survival and recovery of endangered species
• An Executive Order restricting the introduction of potentially harmful foreign plants and animals into the United States

Actions which affirm our concern for the global environment

• A major interagency study to assess potential global environmental changes and their impact on the United States
• An offer to assist interested nations in dealing with population problems
• Inclusion of environmental considerations in assistance programs of the Agency for International Development
• Support for a number of international environmental agreements
• A prohibition on commercial whaling in the U.S. 200-mile fisheries zone

Actions to improve implementation of environmental laws

• An Executive Order directing the Council on Environmental Quality to issue regulations reducing paperwork in the environmental impact statement process
• Development of legislation to create one consolidated environmental grant program
• A review of environmental coordination legislation to reduce overlapping and conflicting requirements.