

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION

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MONDAY,  
AUGUST 29, 2005

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8:00am Plenary Session  
Jim Connaughton's  
Opening and Closing Remarks

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to the White Conference on Cooperative Conservation Strengthening Shared Governance and Citizen Stewardship hosted by the Council on Environmental Quality, the Departments of Interior, Agricultural, Commerce and Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency. Please welcome to the stage Jim Connaughton, Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Good morning, everybody.  
(Chorus of good mornings.)

MR. CONNAUGHTON: There we go. Welcome to the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation. On behalf of President Bush, my boss, I want to thank you for your participation in this exciting convocation that is going to help us chart the course for conservation in the 21st century.

Today we are going to learn from a wide variety of cooperative conservation stories from every sector and every place in America. Tomorrow we will then have an opportunity to work together in breakout sessions to discuss these stories and add to them with your own experiences and your own insight. Then on Wednesday, we'll conclude the conference with a discussion on how all of us can come together and use these examples to help build on America's rich legacy of conservation.

Now as we join here today, our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and the other Gulf States. Some of our participants here today are from those states. In fact, many of them work on restoration efforts that are essential to improving our natural resilience to natural disasters.

This conference is about supporting those efforts. In addition, it carries forward the charge that President Bush gave to us in Executive Order 13352 that he signed in August of 2004. That order calls upon the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency to implement laws relating to environment and natural resources in a way that promotes cooperative conservation with an emphasis on local involvement. Cooperative conservation is the most important standing philosophy of how we're going to carry forward our efforts into the coming century.

The President has convened you here today to continue the tradition of conservation conferences going back to the first one convened in 1908 by President Teddy Roosevelt. Cooperative conservation is as much about building working relationships and trust and may I even say

friendship among the participants as it is about insuring proper processes.

So as we meet each other over the course of the next few days, I encourage you to be proactive in finding common ground with people from backgrounds and experiences different than your own. As you all know from attending these conferences, as much happens outside the meeting rooms as happens in the meeting rooms, and I welcome you to take advantage of that.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Jim Connaughton.

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Okay. So is everybody ready?  
(Audience participation.)

MR. CONNAUGHTON: Come on. It can be better than that. Are you ready? Okay. Well, today's going to be a heck of a lot of fun. We're going to be able to listen to some inspiring stories of what's meant by cooperative conservation. My talking points here tell me it's a series of case studies that will be presented to highlight the best of the best. Somehow I fear that's an incomplete expression of course because the sampling that you have in your books, it just scratches the surface of what you all know is out there. So our effort over the course of the next couple days is to bring that forward.

I want to share with you in sending you off a little bit of my own personal story. I just had the privilege a couple weeks ago of taking a bunch of Boy Scouts down to the Florida Keys, and they were down there to go scuba diving and have a bunch of fun doing the Boy Scout thing. But Boy Scouts do service wherever they go, whatever trip they do. They always want to do service. So we had the opportunity to take those Boy Scouts to the shallows to the sea grasses and also a different group on some coral bleaching survey work.

And I'm going to tell you and you all know, but let's reinforce this. You know these Scouts they had never seen those aquatic environments, the shallows and then the corals and imagine the temperature. It was about 96 degrees and 100 percent humidity and they were coming down from Washington but even that environment was challenging. We were out on these open boats and basically in the sea grasses, these guys were picking up a bunch of trash underwater, snorkeling, free diving, to pick up a bunch of trash.

The other group was doing coral bleach watching. They had a scientist explain to them what it was

about, explain to them how to do the survey work. They were given these little armbands where they could figure out extensive live-coral cover and how much was bleached that they put on their arms when they went down scuba diving. As you all might imagine, of course, it's hot. It's hard work. It's humid. But these guys had a blast. It was very interesting and they loved it and they came away not just enriched for their experience of being outside but enriched for the experience of interacting with the government people that set this up, interacting with the environment, and looking at it in a way that they might never even imagine back in their science classes.

So as you go out today and as we go out in the next couple of days and you saw in the videos and you heard from the President, I want us to focus on three core objectives as we figure out the cross currents and how we carry this mission forward. But I want to focus on three things. One is what that hard work means. Because to the Scouts, boy it was sweating and hard work but it was a hard work of a nature that inspires the soul. So as we work through the common threads of our partnerships, what is it about hard work in the spirit of conservation that matters.

Two, what made it very interesting for these Scouts is the fact it was educational. They learned something about where they were in the world and they learned something about themselves and I think that cuts across everything we're going to talk about in the next couple of days.

And the third, of course, even as the Scouts shared their disgust of the mindlessness of the knuckleheads who are polluting the system and really weren't paying attention, the zeal with which they undertook this effort of conservation, working with Federal agencies and other NGO groups, was a heck of a lot of fun. We cannot succeed if we don't make this fun and enriching.

So what is it about the best of these stories that inspires people and has them come away from the experience with a smile on their face, not just the sweat on their brow. So I leave that to all of you. I look forward to a fun few days and then what we carry on beyond this. So enjoy yourselves and have a lot of good conversations. Thanks.

ANNOUNCER: This concludes the opening preliminary session of the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation.