

Remarks sent by Bill Ruckelshaus
Upon the naming of the William D. Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources
University of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyoming
September 5, 2002

Thanks to President Phil Dubois for the kind introduction. I am deeply honored that the University would chose to name the Institute after me, and now the Institute will share in my lifelong affliction of having to correct the spelling of Ruckelshaus at least 14 times each day.

When Al Simpson graced the halls of Congress with his imposing 6 foot 4 frame and incisive wit, he garnered a reputation for being a highly responsible legislator and Senator. Now to many this meant that no matter what went wrong, from Supreme Court nominations to Ted Kennedy, HE was responsible.

But in the case of the Institute of Environment and Natural Resources, there is some truth to this. Certainly Al is responsible for my involvement with the Institute dating back some eight years ago. Always a master of timing, Al waited until I had just sought his assistance on a matter of great national importance: garbage. I was the CEO of a large national trash company at the time, and Al knew that he had me over a barrel, a trash barrel to be exact. His casual mention that that the University and the Foundation Board had decided to invest in an Institute made it sound like all I would be doing out here was fishing for mammoth sized trout in the snowy range, and attending art auctions, and opera with Cynthia Lummis.

But much has transpired in eight years, and due to the gargantuan and tireless efforts and support of many of you seated in this room, IENR has achieved many of the goals it originally set out for itself. Chief among these is the mission the Institute adopted in 1996: "to advance effective decision making on environmental and natural resource issues by promoting and assisting collaborative informed approaches that sustain both the economy and the environment." As with most good mission statements there is much packed into these few, seemingly simple concepts that have guided our development.

For starters, the Institute and the University have managed to steer clear of a major shoal, that of trying to impose its own solutions, brilliant though they are, on a particular problem. Helping citizens discover for themselves a common ground or creative alternative is a very different exercise than telling a community how it should proceed.

But perhaps one of the most significant achievements of IENR is that it has already begun to help the University rediscover its role and its relevance in assisting society and governments in solving many of the thorny, often debilitating problems that afflict us, especially in the area of environment and natural resources. It has done this by following our original strategic plan. This plan is being revisited under the able leadership of Ed Pollak.

In so doing, IENR and the University are heeding the advice of someone who thought a great deal about how democracies and also institutions of higher learning should comport themselves:

Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, in sharp contrast to Plato who would have preferred a kingdom ruled by philosophers including perhaps professors of the University of Wyoming (an idea that may appeal to some of you), argued this: If you think the people not enlightened enough to use their powers wisely, the solution is not to remove or restrict those powers, but to enlighten the people.

And this exactly what the Institute, accessing the considerable resources and talent of the University, has been doing. For example, under Don Kendall's leadership the Institute has been conducting a rigorous examination of growth and its impact on open spaces in Wyoming. They have researched and documented a number of very interesting trends, including these facts:

- Over half of Wyoming's growth is in rural areas outside incorporated towns, especially in Sublette, Lincoln, Crook and Fremont counties;
- When farms or ranches are converted to residential use, the state's subdivision laws often requires these subdivisions to be 35 acres or more, resulting in low density development on large area tracts, with impacts on open space, scenic vistas, wildlife habitat and rural culture.
- Many of these rural residences are second homes, with the number of second homes in Wyoming increasing by 30 percent, or twice the national average.
- Private lands in Wyoming provide about 50 percent of the critical winter range and migration corridors used by deer, antelope and elk, and conversion of private ranch land can adversely affect some of Wyoming's big game herds.

It is important to note that in this case, by uncovering trends and utilizing economics, sociology, geology, hydrology, and tools such as Geographic Information Systems, the Institute is not making or even suggesting what the policies should be governing growth in Wyoming. What they are doing is informing the debate with credible science, and providing tools and information, and significantly a forum, where disparate parties, the public and policy makers can begin to hash out their differences.

On this issue, as with several other issues including brucellosis, endangered species on private property, nitrate contamination of groundwater in Torrington, and the National Environmental Policy Act to name but a few, the Institute and the University are attempting something rare among institutions of higher learning. They are attempting to create an institutional theater where science and policy making can come together more efficiently, and produce more light than heat.

With visionary leadership from the University's foundation and board, and especially the unwavering support of President Phil Dubois, and the tireless efforts of Harold Bergman, the Institute staff and Bill Gern, the Institute is setting an example for land grant institutions around the country by helping to restore the University to its original mission: helping citizens solve problems. This is a vision for the University of the 21st century, which is not just educating citizens, providing extension services, or publishing scholarly journals - certainly tasks enough- but fusing credible science and collaborative processes to help citizens address watershed disputes, or the rapid development of land and the loss of open space, or mitigate the environment impacts of coal bed methane.

This experiment we are engaged in here in Wyoming is important. The consequences of failing to find ways to allow science and collaboration to improve our ability to address polarized natural resource issues is not good, and not just for America. If we cannot, with all our knowledge and political stability and wealth figure out how to manage our own natural resources for present and future generations, how can we expect people in the rest of the world to do it. We need our solutions to serve as a democratic example. That is still the best way to lead. Otherwise we are going to lose huge swaths of the natural world.

We are engaged in laying the foundation for a new American institution, one that builds on the technical and democratic strengths of our nation and region. It's significant that collaborative processes are native to the American west, and are finding a welcome home here at the University of Wyoming.

Let me close with this. The author Wallace Stegner wrote: "Angry as one may be at what heedless men have done to a noble habitat, one cannot be pessimistic about the West. This is the native home of hope. When it fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves it, then it will have achieved itself and outlived its origins. Then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery."

Thank you again for the high honor you have accorded me. I have every confidence that with the stalwart support of you seated here tonight, and with the sure-handed and visionary leadership of Mike Sullivan, this experiment will continue to succeed, and blaze a path for others to follow.