

REMARKS OF
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TO THE
SUNCOAST SPINNING CLUB
REDINGTON SHORES, FLORIDA
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It is good to be back in Pinellas County, and it is even better to be back to talk about something other than Pinellas Politics!

Although those of you who have been reading your local papers in recent days may not believe it, the contributions by Governor Bryant to conservation in Florida will likely be the best remembered evidence of his service some five, ten or twenty years from now.

In the letter confirming his invitation to me for this meeting, Red suggested that among the topics I cover should be the question of whether or not conservation is more than a lip-word at Tallahassee -- a political expediency was the term he used.

Well, I can tell you tonight in absolute honesty that there's more conservation activity going on in Florida government today than at any time in the history of our state -- and that's being done not from political motivation, but from the realization that if action to save our natural heritage is not immediate and extensive, future citizens will find very little left of the Florida outdoors which has attracted so many here to work and play.

Today, with five million citizens, we are the ninth largest of the 50 states. In the next ten years we will increase by some three million, and with each new addition the recreational opportunities for each individual are squeezed ever smaller.

When he took office Governor Bryant was acutely aware that Florida's best assets -- its outdoor recreational areas -- were being drained away in the name of progress -- a progress that we can ill afford if we are to meet the potential of our future.

The Governor knew, for example, that of the thousand and 16 miles of useable sand beach along our coast, of which he boasts when he travels to other states and overseas, there is but 257 miles -- barely 25 per cent -- still in accessible public ownership, and that only 23.7 miles of this lies within state parks.

The Governor was aware, too, that the state had, since its inception, been engaged in a gigantic land disposal program in which public lands were auctioned off, sold or given away to stimulate development with little concern for their current or potential worth to the public. He discovered that the state had no adequate knowledge of just what lands it owned or just what their worth might be for public purposes. He knew that similar lost lands drove New York in 1960 to float a 75 million dollar bond issue to buy back lands, and that California is to have a similar 75 million dollar issue on its 1962 ballot, and that New Hampshire, Wisconsin, New Jersey and Pennsylvania were all going in debt for from 10 to 70 million dollars to acquire land for the recreational needs of their expanding populations.

The Governor knew that unless he initiated action, and that quickly, that Florida would find itself in the same position as these other states -- a position it could ill afford as we seek to support schools and the services made essential by our growth without the imposition of heavier taxes.

And so it was that just a year ago Governor Bryant appointed the Governor's Committee on Recreational Development, whose emblem, which I have brought here tonight, is symbolic of its interests, and placed it under the leadership of one of his staff assistants -- a qualified professional engineer with conservation agency experience; the first such person, incidentally, ever to serve on the personal staff of a Florida governor.

This Committee is going a great deal further in the area of resource preservation and development than its "recreational development" title would indicate. It is providing for the first time in our state an effective forum for cooperation and coordination between state agencies, and it has given the citizens of Florida an opportunity to lay their conservation problems and ideas before a single group combining all areas of state interest.

It is appropriate that coordination on conservation matters should exist within state government, for our current expenditures in this field total more than 36 million dollars -- and this is not enough.

When this committee meets, as it did yesterday morning, it brings together around a single table the heads of the Department of Conservation, the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, the Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, the Forest Service, the recreation and planning divisions of the Development Commission, the staff of the Trustees of the State Internal Improvement Fund and the Land Office of the Department of Agriculture and the various departments and divisions of the Board of Conservation and Game Commission.

These meetings have fostered an exchange of ideas and knowledge that has established new patterns of operation and a better basis for effective service, both to the elected members of the State Cabinet who sit as the Board of Conservation and Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, and to the members of the independent Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and to the citizens of Florida, individually and in conservation organizations such as this.

The approach adopted by this committee is worthy of emulation by all interested in conservation: it is based upon the belief that good resource management hinges upon a multiple interrelationship concept, which in its recently released interim report it defined by its recognition that "Nature is a Unity. We cannot separate the fish from the water, nor the trees from the soil." This is the guideline that overrides the narrow channels of authority assigned each agency and division.

The Committee has been instrumental in implementing the Governor's order that indiscriminate sale of state lands be halted. It serves in behalf of the Cabinet to review all requests for the purchase of public property. If the lands sought by private owners are of value for present or future public usage, they are withheld from sale and, in most cases, dedicated for public purposes. The Committee works closely with the State Road Department and the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District, and similar regional bodies such as that concerned with the river basins of this area, to be sure that the public interest is thoroughly considered in all matters of land management, and that when public lands are sold they bear a fair price. The day of give away land in Florida is gone forever.

A year ago no inventory of state-owned lands existed. Today we know that Florida holds more than 400,000 acres worth nearly 50 million dollars.

We know, too, that these 652 parcels of land will not be enough to meet the demands of our exploding population, and so we have set about acquiring additional lands of present or potential recreational and conservation value. Already some 500 acres are being acquired from the Federal Government's holdings in the state. Much of this is highly valuable beach-frontage and so our bargain was deemed a good one when we found that this \$200,000 worth of land was ours for just over a thousand dollars.

The Committee has been involved in a number of other activities which have significance for this area:

They have played a leading role in the establishment of some outstanding fresh water fishing holes in the Tampa Bay area's backyard. Mined out phosphate pits, closed to the public for years, have been made available through cooperative agreements negotiated by the committee and through the cleaning out and restocking programs of the Game Commission.

These modern versions of the old fishing hole will be made available to the public on a rotating basis so that you can always be assured of big bass and bream when you tackle them. So far some two dozen of the pits are in preparation and the results have been excellent from those now open.

Similarly, the Committee has worked with the Game Commission on its large scale lake restoration programs. Lake Parker, in Lakeland, is a good example of what such a program can mean. This lake was treated chemically to destroy all rough fish. It was restocked with the proper balance of ^{the}various types of game fish. Subsequently, when it was reopened to the public, between 17 and 18 thousand people fished Lake Parker in the short space of nine days. A similar program, incidentally, is in the works for Lake Tarpon.

The vital research program of the Board of Conservation, most of which is carried out from the state's marine laboratory in St. Petersburg, received an important boost from the Governor's determination, and the committee's action in seeing to it that the

leases granted for the dredging of oyster shell bring a proper return to Florida and her citizens. As a result of re-negotiations of these leases the monies available from them for marine research will increase from 40 to 50 thousand to in excess of 200 thousand dollars annually. This means more research support for artificial reefs and a host of other important projects beneficial to sport and commercial fishermen alike. It means, too, new funds to fight pollution, the blight of all too many of Florida's bays and rivers.

You have heard a good bit, and will be hearing a great deal more, about the Cross-State Florida Barge Canal. It, too, plays a role in our conservation program. This canal, linking our east and west coasts at mid-state, will have a three-fold benefit for natural resource conservation in Florida. Through its lock system it will serve to raise the water table in the drought-affected central Florida area. It will provide the means of conserving the great flow which rises from Silver Springs and Rainbow Springs, and its construction will provide reservoir and holding areas tailor-made for the sports fisherman and hunter.

This project, over the many years it has been under discussion, has come as close to being studied to death as any project in the history of the state. Of the many official reports in the canal's file, there are some which have lacked encouragement, but none which have shown it unfeasible. The most recent of the reports, first made public this week, was made at the direction of the Congress by the Arthur D. Little Corporation, a firm of nationally recognized consultants. This economic study shows that the benefit to cost return outlook for the canal on an annual basis is four dollars and sixty cents return for each dollar expended, on a project life of 50 years, or a whopping 6.1 to 1 for a 100 year project life. This study is perhaps the most complete and unbiased ever made on the canal and, although it reflects no boost from National Defense benefits, it still stands as one of the most favorable benefit-cost ratios of any navigation project of which we know. From every indication this is the year of the Cross-State Canal and its coming will be a boon to conservation.

Just yesterday the Governor's Committee approved a project of importance to Florida which has also nation-wide significance. Jay N. Darling -- he was better known as Ding -- was a Pulitzer prize-winning cartoonist (he had two of them to his credit) and perhaps one of the most ardent conservationists our country has ever known. He served for a time as head of the Federal Government's Biological Survey, the forerunner of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For the last 24 years of his life Ding Darling made Florida his home, residing on Captiva Island off Fort Myers and spending some time in Tarpon Springs. He established the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge and was a leader in saving the famed Key Deer. He knew Florida and he loved Florida. He died two months ago.

Yesterday the first formal steps were taken to add 2,000 acres to the present refuge lands on Sanibel Island and dedicate the whole parcel as the Ding Darling Sanctuary. We are advised that the administrative actions Governor Bryant has initiated will be formalized by the Florida Legislature and the United States Congress and that with the support of a national foundation created to honor Mr. Darling's memory, a living conservation memorial will rise in Florida that will be of national value and note.

These are but a few of the activities Ned, that we submit as evidence that conservation is receiving more than political lip-service in Tallahassee. But they tell only a part of the story.

The Governor's Committee on Recreational Development is seeking to create for Florida a master plan of development and action which will assure our present and future citizens access to nature; places to fish, hunt, birdwatch, picnic and play in clean air under a bright sun.

If that plan is to be properly developed -- and if anything is going to come of it once it is complete -- then a lot of Floridians -- like you and me -- are going to have to talk less and do more about conservation in our state.

The Committee is even now trying to get a meeting established of the heads of all statewide voluntary conservation agencies, to discuss with them the programs under consideration and the plans just

emerging from the dream stage toward reality. The Florida Wildlife Federation undertook to arrange this meeting for us, but has had to postpone calling it because thus far a full list of the conservation organizations is not available.

If pollution is going to be eliminated -- if artificial reefs are going to be properly established, if the boating council created by the Board of Conservation is going to accomplish any real good, and if you are ever going to channel your interests in Florida's outdoors into anything more constructive than listening to me; then lines of communication must be established so that the progress I have outlined to you tonight can be made known to you as it occurs. Your support which can be vital on many measures of importance to Florida must be made known to the Governor and legislators.

For too long clubs such as this have gone alone on their merry way! The Issack Walton League, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, the Wildlife Federation and all the rest have stayed wrapped -- each in its own limited conservation cocoon. If ever there was a time for each of these groups to break out of the cocoon and try its wings in unison with others to serve its own interests by promoting conservation generally; that time exists today. In Tallahassee you have a state administration that cares about saving what little we have left of nature's blessings for the future. In Washington there is a greater awareness of a need for resource development than at any time in recent years.

What's needed now is for individuals such as you in this club to do more than depend on Red Marston to tell you what's going on in conservation. Ask for information -- give us your opinions, share with us your experiences.

If all the people interested in conservation in Florida -- regardless of whether they call it hunting, fishing, birdwatching or whatever -- if all the individuals who love the water and the woods, the clean air and the sparkling streams that are this state of ours -- if all can be united for the future, then the only limit on the good that can be accomplished for Florida is the limit of our imaginations and abilities.