

THE CENTURY OF CHANGE

Remarks of the President

at the

Signing Ceremony for

Assateague Island Seashore National Park Bill



September 21, 1965

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

*I just wanted you to know the efforts your government
is making to preserve our natural resources and con-
serve our lands for recreation for our people.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Lyndon B. Johnson".

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MR. SECRETARY OF INTERIOR, SENATOR JACKSON,
CHAIRMAN ASPINALL, GOVERNOR TAWES, MEMBERS
OF CONGRESS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

We are living in the Century of Change.

But if future generations are to remember us more with gratitude than with sorrow, we must achieve more than just the miracles of technology. We must also leave them a glimpse of the world as God really made it, not just as it looked when we got through with it.

Thanks to this bill that I will sign this morning, we can now do that with Assateague Island. It stretches some 33 miles along the Maryland and Virginia coastline. This is the last undeveloped seashore between Massachusetts and North Carolina.

One-fifth of all the people in our Nation live within an easy day's drive of Assateague. And now as a result of your labors--you, the farsighted Members of Congress--these wide sandy beaches will be the people's to enjoy forever.

A DREAM BECOMES A REALITY

They were almost lost. The National Park Service, as Secretary Udall will testify, first recommended an Assateague National Seashore 30 years ago, back in 1935. Many Congressmen and Senators have come and gone since that time. Many bills were introduced in the Congress. Many proposals were made. But few proposals were acted upon and it took us 30 years to make this dream a reality.

Sometimes I think we must learn to move faster. Our population is growing every year, but our shoreline is not. Of the more than 3,700 miles of shoreline along our Atlantic and Gulf coasts, only 105 miles--really less than 3 percent--are available to us today for the public to use.

What the Good Lord once gave in greatest abundance have now become rare and very precious possessions. Clear water, warm sandy beaches are a nation's real treasure.

OUR SHORELINE MUST BE PRESERVED

For the rest of this century, the shoreline within reach of the major cities of this country just must be preserved and must be maintained primarily for the recreation of our people. This cannot be done by the Federal Government alone. Conservationists, State governments, led by men like Governor Tawes, municipalities led by my good friend Mayor McKeldin and others, the States and cities working with the Federal Government--all of us must put the bit in our teeth and act, and we must begin to act now if this basic heritage is to be preserved for future generations.

We have already accomplished much. Last year we acquired Fire Island National Seashore in New York--and it is within easy reach of one out of every four Americans in this country. Like Assateague, which we acquire today, Fire Island symbolizes the new philosophy we have in this

country of conservation. We are going to acquire our places of recreation where they will do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

The year I was born, 57 years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt held a great conference on conservation here in the White House. He was a member of another party. He is remembered as the conservation President, and he and the other great conservationist, Gifford Pinchot, rescued millions of acres of Western wilderness from commercial exploitation.

OUR HERITAGE WILL BE EXTENDED

Well, I grew up in that West. I know what that heritage means. And I pledge you that so long as I am your President, I mean to preserve and I mean to extend that heritage for all of our people, East as well as West, North as well as South. I intend to seek out what can still be saved, and with your help, will try to preserve it for unborn generations. I intend to find those oases of natural beauty which should never have been lost in the first place, and to reclaim them for all the people of this country.

Conservation has been in eclipse in this country ever since Theodore Roosevelt's day. Members of the House will listen with care because conservation had barely gotten off the ground when Uncle Joe Cannon, the Speaker of the House in those days, issued one of his many ultimatums, and he said: "Not one cent for scenery."

RECLAMATION A CONCERN OF CONGRESS

Well, those days are gone and forgotten, and we are going to start repealing Cannon's Law here today. We are declaring a new doctrine of conservation. And I hope before my allotted time has run out, to see the best and the fairest regions of America a matter of daily concern among

the leaders of both parties and among the representatives of all this Government.

I hope to see the preservation-or the reclamation-of those areas become an annual concern of the Congress.

I hope that we will be here several times each session, adding to our treasure, and to our national assets. I want to see our unrivaled power to create matched by America's equal power to conserve.

We have already gone far in that direction. We have almost doubled the portion of our precious shoreline in our national park system. And every Member of the Congress that has had a part in that can take great pride this morning. Almost 320,000 acres of sand dunes and beaches are now a perpetual possession of all our people.

27 MILLION ACRES RESERVED

Nearly 27 million acres of the most beautiful land in America have been set aside for the joy and the pleasure of present and future generations. I have asked the conservation and park and seashore people to put under the microscope every acre that has been declared surplus by our great Defense Department to see if somehow, somewhere the little people of America might not be able to enjoy this in the few hours of relaxation that is theirs on a weekend.

Most of this would have been impossible except for a conservation-minded Congress led by competent, able, and thorough men. And that is the kind of Congress that we have. The 88th Congress passed more than 30 major conservation bills. And I salute the Senate and the House and the Secretary of Interior for his leadership in that field. The 89th Congress is already adding magnificently to that record. And we haven't finished it yet.

These have been memorable years in the history of conservation. But the work is unfinished. We have shown what can be done. And if we can continue the same superb record which we have already begun, the day will soon come when we can say to our people: Your heritage is secure.

It was over a hundred years ago that Henry David Thoreau looked out upon the beauty of America and wrote: "It is a noble country where we dwell, fit for a stalwart race to summer in."

SUMMER OF OUR GREATNESS

So it remains for us, who live in the summer of our greatness as a nation, to preserve both the vision and the beauty which gave it rise.

And I hope the picture of those of you who have made this possible, who gathered here for this event this morning, will be hung in prominent places in this land where those who come after you can see the wisdom of your vision and your efforts. Thank you very much.