

**“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of
Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969**

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LBJ’s Government Organization: Task Force Solutions

Overview Providing Context for Educator

President Johnson’s Great Society initiatives required an all hands-on deck approach to formulating beneficial policies. LBJ was inspired by the task force organization implemented during President Roosevelt’s New Deal formation. He organized a similar structure to tackle the most pressing issues including protection of natural resources, pollution, and conservation. Task forces were working groups that created recommendations for policy. The task forces operated under complete secrecy, only sharing their reports with the President. He then determined the best course of action in pursuing legislation.

These working groups were divided into two categories, outside task forces or interagency task forces. The outside task forces were composed of experts not affiliated with the government. The purpose of creating external task forces, separate from government agencies, was to promote new ideas. Many of the issues task forces explored were cross departmental, needing input from diverse voices. LBJ recognized that would never happen under the directors of government agencies. The interagency task forces were comprised of government employees and representatives. Both task force categories followed the same protocols and processes.

Task force organization was first introduced in the May 22, 1964 speech given by President Johnson to the graduating class at University of Michigan Ann Arbor. He then went on to organize fourteen task forces related to Great Society mandates. Each task force was requested to brainstorm ideas and possibilities, with no budgetary constraints imposed. The task force suggestions then moved to another committee tasked with screening for practicalities and cost.

LBJ wanted balanced committees with both “thinkers and doers.” (*Vantage Point*, 327) He used task forces throughout his entire administration utilizing the expertise of 300 businessmen, labor leaders, and teachers referring to them as his “brain trust.” (*Vantage Point*, 328) He credits their time and efforts to formulating the legislation of the Great Society.

Environment Task Forces:

- 1964 Task Force on the Environmental Pollution
- 1964 Task Force on Natural Resources
- 1964 Task Force on Natural Beauty
- 1966 Task Force on Natural Resources
- 1966 Task Force on Quality on the Environment
- 1968 Task Force on Quality on the Environment

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Activity: Break into groups to analyze the following excerpt from the 1964 Task Force Report on Environmental Pollution dated November 9, 1964. Using the source, answer the following questions:

Note three environmental problems as stated by this task force.

Why is the environment the government’s responsibility?

Note three solutions as stated in the source.

Something to consider: Could LBJ’s mandate for secrecy be considered executive over-reach?

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Source: 1964 Task Force Report on Environmental Pollution dated November 9, 1964, page 2 in archives at the LBJ Library.

uses of water. Toxic chemicals are finding their way in increasing amounts into natural waters. Massive mortalities of fishes have taken place in rivers, lakes and estuaries. Valuable shellfish and shrimp fisheries are retreating before relentless advances of pollution.

Precious agricultural soils, irreplaceable resources of our nation, are now showing alarming signs of pollution from persistent pesticides applied year after year for the control of insects, weeds, and other pests. Some of these chemicals, often lingering long after application, are (in some instances) taken up by crops, and reach our people's food either directly or through our livestock. The scope and importance of this newly-recognized soil pollution have not yet been adequately evaluated. In one state, however, more than seven percent of the land used for growing vegetables contains so much residue of pesticides that certain crops cannot be grown there without taking up amounts of chemicals beyond the tolerance limits. The majority of our orchard lands contain so much pesticide that they could not be converted to vegetable or forage crops if it were desired to do so. Some lands are so heavily polluted with arsenic, copper, and lead that they will now support no useful vegetation of any kind.

In some irrigated areas of the country, soil pollution from salt is a growing problem.

So far, our soils have been adequately protected from radioactive pollution.

The side effects from the use of pesticides are of real concern. Bees and so other beneficial insects (pollinators, predators, and parasites) are severely reduced in numbers to the detriment of both wild and cultivated plants. Certain invertebrates, as earthworms and some insects, accumulate pesticides. This results in the injury or death of many birds and other animals preying on such contaminated food. Residues of pesticides are now detectable in penguins in the Antarctic, snowy owls in the Arctic, fishes far at sea, as well as in nearly all birds and mammals in the United States. Often more than one pesticide is present. Pesticides have probably caused or contributed to recent drastic declines in eagle, osprey, and related bird populations. The full significance of such side effects is yet to be determined.

Collection and disposal of solid wastes is a serious problem in certain areas. Many cities are exhausting nearby land fill areas. The daily accumulation is more than four pounds per person and transportation to the fills costs more than a billion dollars annually.

The Federal Responsibility for Pollution

The land, water, air and living things of the United States are a heritage of the whole nation, and need to be protected for the use of all Americans, both living and the generations yet unborn.

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Source: 1964 Task Force Report on Environmental Pollution dated November 9, 1964, page 3

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Consequences of pollution created in one locality customarily impinge upon the residents of others without regard for man-made confines of countries and states.

Economic competition for sites of production tends to favor weak regulation since both abatement and avoidance of pollution usually raise production costs.

The Federal Government, through its administration of public lands, establishments and other large facilities, its purchases of equipment and supplies, and its responsibilities for waste disposal, has a substantial impact on the economy and is in a unique position to exercise leadership and influence in pollution abatement on a national scale.

For all these reasons the Federal Government has repeatedly affirmed its policy to accept an increasing responsibility for the problems of pollution.

We urge that this be reaffirmed in the broadest terms and at the highest levels, now and in the future, and suggest that it could be well expressed in this form:

"It is our national policy to shield our nation's air, water, soil and living resources from pollution and its consequences and, with this aim in mind, to take such measures as may be necessary to protect these priceless heritages for the benefit of the nation as a whole."

Federal Policy Guidelines

So that the Federal Government contributes more effectively to the implementation of this policy, we urge the adoption of a set of Federal policy guidelines including the following points:

1. The Federal Government should encourage, by legislation and persuasion the establishment and the operation of interstate compacts or other regional agreements or plans suitable for dealing effectively with the pollution of interstate river basins and estuaries, of air sheds involving large metropolitan areas extending into more than one state, and of water zones involving ocean or lake waters bordering on more than one state.
2. The United States should stand ready to cooperate with its neighbors, both informally and formally, in controlling and abating pollution of international river basins, air sheds, and water zones.
3. The Federal Government should cooperate with, and complement the actions of, state and local governments to preserve from pollution our public recreational and wilderness resources, be these beaches, bays, estuaries, rivers, lakes, mountains, wilderness areas, dunes, islands, parks, monuments, forests, prairies, wildlife refuges, marshes, swamps, or primitive areas.

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Source: Task Force Summary on Environmental Pollution dated November 9, 1964

The Pollution of the Environment

America is a bountiful land--rich in its people, its ability to produce, and its resources. We have been, among the nations of the earth, more than fortunate. The settlers who came here found vast forests, pure running streams, and sparkling air. Our history has been made beside our great rivers: the Hudson, the Savannah, the Potomac, the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Colorado, the Columbia--names which bring to life the adventure of the opening of a continent.

The fertile soils of America have pured forth an abundance of food and fiber sufficient to make us the best nourished Nation in the history of the world, and scientific progress has truly "made the desert bloom." The rich black muck lands of the Northeast, the cotton and tobacco farm of the South, the corn and wheat belt of the Midwest, and the citrus groves of California represent a diversified and productive agriculture.

But over the fertile valleys and farms hangs a pall of polluted air; the great rivers run dark with pollution; the soil is heavy with increasing quantities of chemicals.

We are today an industrial nation--an urban nation--a nation choking in its waste products.

Every day we need 350 billion gallons of fresh water to sustain our economy and our lives--by 1980, we will need 600 billion. And in 1980, we will only have available slightly over 500 billion gallons. We will have to use, reuse, and conserve every available gallons of fresh water.

We need 640 cubic miles of air each year just to burn the gasoline we use in our motor cars. Automobiles burn as much air as our total population breathes. Burning our fossil fuels releases nearly 50,000 tons of sulfur dioxide into the air every day.

We are applying 700 million pounds of agricultural chemicals to our soil every year.

The great benefits of industrial might, of urbanization, of increased agricultural production have been accompanied with serious problems. Our generation has managed to alter the composition of the atmosphere on a global scale through the emission of radioactive material and a steady increase in carbon dioxide from the burning of our fossil fuels. The impact on our existence is unknown. Mass death of fishes have occurred in our rivers over-burdened with waste water and lately polluted with pesticides. Air pollution is not any longer confined to isolated areas. Whole areas--regional airsheds and river basins--are laden with noxious materials.

In spite of the great efforts and accomplishments of the past, water pollution problems are increasing and spreading. New kinds of problems are being added to the old. Fertilizing elements, not removed in conventional sewage treatment plants, are causing rank growths of algae and plants in

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Source: Task Force Summary on Environmental Pollution dated November 9, 1964.

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We need to understand the causes and effects of pollution better than we do now; for the effects of pollution will be more severely felt by generations to follow us--and we cannot wait for history to judge our efforts.

We hope to leave a nation to our children which will be better than we knew--a nation with pleasant surroundings and free from toxic substances in the environment.

Our environment is still livable--even if uncomfortable in certain areas and at certain times. Most of us can turn the tap and draw safe, drinkable water. Our daily accumulation of trash is somehow carried off.

But the accumulation of pollution is accelerating. If we are to preserve and protect our heritage of beauty and plenty, we must act now.

To accomplish these goals, I propose a program of action--supported by the necessary buildup of scientific resources and manpower. I intend to bring the full weight of the Federal policy and philosophy to bear on the reduction of pollution. As immediate steps, I have directed the following action to be taken in the Executive Branch:

The Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare will undertake a program leading to the cleanup of the 90 most polluted rivers in the Nation. I urge the cooperation of the Governors and their State water agencies in bringing pollution under control. The 90 rivers program can be accomplished by an effective combination of Federal-State regulatory authority, incentive grants, and the wholehearted participation of private enterprise.

The Secretary of the Interior will develop a national fuel policy leading to the reduction of sulfur emission from fossil fuels in areas of dense population.

An expanded program to prevent acid mine drainage and clean up abandoned strip mines will be established by the Interior Department.

The Secretary of Agriculture will intensify research, regulatory, control and educational programs to determine the degree of soil contamination with chemicals, and to reduce the use of hazardous chemicals by developing alternative methods and non-hazardous chemical techniques.

I have directed the Secretaries of the three agencies to increase their research efforts in the field of pollution control; to give special attention to the flow of representative pollutants through the environment; to examine the mechanisms of natural degradation; and to develop effective and coordinated national monitoring systems to keep a constant check on the quality of our water, air, soil, and food supply.

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Activity:

Harness the power of your class’ knowledge of task forces to form a classroom or campus task force to address an environmental concern at school or in your community. This project contains elements of research and advocating for a solution.

Resources: Helping students organize for the environment:

https://files.peacecorps.gov/documents/PC_Environmental_Activity_508_mNd3UVx.pdf

https://www.whatkidscando.org/resources/spec_youthorganizing.html

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113.16. Social Studies, Grade 5, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(5) History. The student understands important issues, events, and individuals in the United States during the 20th and 21st centuries. The student is expected to:

(A) explain the significance of issues and events of the 20th century such as industrialization, urbanization, the Great Depression, the world wars, the civil rights movement, and military actions

(C) identify the accomplishments and contributions of individuals and groups such as Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, the Tuskegee Airmen, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in the areas of civil rights, women's rights, military actions, and politic

(17) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of individual participation in the democratic process at the local, state, and national levels. The student is expected to:

(A) explain why individuals have a duty to participate in civic affairs at the local, state, and national levels; and

(B) explain how to contact elected and appointed leaders in local, state, and national governments.

(18) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) identify past and present leaders in the national government, including the president and various members of Congress, and their political parties; and

(B) identify leadership qualities of national leaders, past and present.

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113.16. Social Studies, Grade 5, Continued

(23) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as technology; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States;

(B) analyze information by applying absolute and relative chronology through sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(C) organize and interpret information in outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps;

(D) identify different points of view about an issue, topic, historical event, or current event; and

(E) identify the historical context of an event.

(24) Social studies skills. The student uses geographic tools to collect, analyze, and interpret data. The student is expected to:

(A) apply mapping elements, including grid systems, legends, symbols, scales, and compass roses, to create and interpret maps; and

(B) interpret geographic data, population distribution, and natural resources into a variety of formats such as graphs and maps

(25) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(B) incorporate main and supporting ideas in verbal and written communication;

(C) express ideas orally based on research and experiences; and

(D) create written and visual material such as journal entries, reports, graphic organizers, outlines, and bibliographies.

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113.18. Social Studies, Grade 6, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills.

(1) History. The student understands that historical events influence contemporary events. The student is expected to:

(B) analyze the historical background of various contemporary societies to evaluate relationships between past conflicts and current conditions.

(10) Government. The student understands various ways in which people organize governments. The student is expected to:

(A) identify and give examples of governments with rule by one, few, or many

(11) Citizenship. The student understands that the nature of citizenship varies among societies. The student is expected to:

(A) describe and compare roles and responsibilities of citizens in various contemporary societies, including the United States; and

(B) explain how opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process vary among various contemporary societies

(12) Citizenship. The student understands the relationship among individual rights, responsibilities, duties, and freedoms in societies with representative governments. The student is expected to:

(A) identify and explain the duty of civic participation in societies with representative governments; and

(B) explain relationships among rights, responsibilities, and duties in societies with representative governments.

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113.19. Social Studies, Grade 7, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(15) Citizenship. The student understands the rights and responsibilities of Texas citizens in a democratic society. The student is expected to:

(B) explain civic responsibilities of Texas citizens and the importance of civic participation

(17) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society. The student is expected to:

(A) identify the leadership qualities of elected and appointed leaders of Texas, past and present, including Texans who have been president of the United States; and

(B) identify the contributions of Texas leaders such as Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross, John Nance Garner ("Cactus Jack"), James A. Baker III, Henry B. González, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Barbara Jordan, Raymond L. Telles, Sam Rayburn, and Raul A. Gonzalez Jr.

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113.41. United States 113.41 History Studies Since 1877, Adopted 2018.

Knowledge and Skills

(10) History. The student understands the impact of political, economic, and social factors in the U.S. from the 1970s through 1990. The student is expected to:

(E) describe significant societal issues of this time period such as the War on Drugs and the AIDS epidemic.

(14) Geography. The student understands the relationship between population growth and the physical environment. The student is expected to:

(A) identify the effects of population growth and distribution on the physical environment; and

(B) identify the roles of governmental entities and private citizens in managing the environment such as the establishment of the National Park System, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Endangered Species Act.

(18) Government. The student understands changes over time in the role of government. The student is expected to:

(B) explain constitutional issues raised by federal government policy changes during times of significant events, including World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the 1960s, and September 11, 2000

(19) Government. The student understands the changing relationships among the three branches of the federal government. The student is expected to:

(B) evaluate the impact of relationships among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, including Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to increase the number of U.S. Supreme Court justices and the presidential election of 2000.

(23) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) evaluate the contributions of significant political and social leaders in the United States such as Andrew Carnegie, Thurgood Marshall, Billy Graham, Sandra Day O'Connor, and Hillary Clinton.

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113.44. United States Government, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(2) History. The student understands the roles played by individuals, political parties, interest groups, and the media in the U.S. political system, past and present. The student is expected to:

(A) describe the processes used by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media to affect public policy; and

(B) analyze the impact of political changes brought about by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media, past and present.

(7) Government. The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the structure and functions of the legislative branch of government, including the bicameral structure of Congress, the role of committees, and the procedure for enacting laws;

(B) analyze the structure and functions of the executive branch of government, including the constitutional powers of the president, the growth of presidential power, and the role of the Cabinet and executive departments

(G) explain the major responsibilities of the federal government for domestic and foreign policy such as national defense

(8) Government. The student understands the concept of federalism. The student is expected to:

(B) categorize government powers as national, state, or shared;

(C) analyze historical and contemporary conflicts over the respective roles of national and state governments; and

(D) explain how the U.S. Constitution limits the power of national and state governments

13) Citizenship. The student understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities. The student is expected to:

(A) describe scenarios where good citizenship may require the subordination of personal desire for the sake of the public good.

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113.44. United States Government, Adopted 2018

(15) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze different points of view of political parties and interest groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the National Rifle Association (NRA).

(17) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the role the government plays in developing policies and establishing conditions that influence scientific discoveries and technological innovations. The student is expected to:

(B) identify examples of government-assisted research that, when shared with the private sector, have resulted in improved consumer products such as computer and communication technologies.

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Primary Sources:

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LJB Library. “Task Force on Environmental Pollution, 11/9/1964.” Box 1. Task Force Collection.

Secondary Sources:

Smith, Nancy Kegan. “Presidential Task Force Operation During the Johnson Administration” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 15, n 2 (Spring, 1985): 320-329.