

GAA 2011 SPEECH

Thank you for that wonderful introduction. It is great to be here for this important conference, and fun to be with so many friends.

I especially want to thank the two Event Co-Chairs. At The Conservation Fund, our roots with both RR Donnelly and National Geographic extend back more than 2 decades. In fact, early in my career with The Conservation Fund, I actually was detailed to the Geographic for almost three years to work on a major initiative about fresh water.

Those were heady days...bumping into Jane Goodall in the hallway...having lunch with Richard Leakey just back from Africa...having a parking space in the garage!

Tough to peak so early in one's career...unfortunately, my status has been on a downhill slide ever since...

Fortunately, The Conservation Fund has been gracious enough to keep me on board.

You see, the Fund is a unique and amazing institution in America – the only nonprofit in the country chartered for both conservation and economic development, the only national environmental group to operate in the black for 27 years in a row, and, according to Charity

Navigator and the American Institute of Philanthropy, the highest rated environmental nonprofit in the country for 11 years in a row,

We have protected more than 7 million acres of land across all 50 states, including more than 2.5 million of working forest. As part of that, we now own and operate more than 100,000 acres of working forests around the country – all of it on the tax rolls, actively managed, and third-party certified, much of it under SFI.

Yet, working forests haven't always been an easy fit for the environmental movement. Back in 1999, when we completed the largest multi-state conservation project in the history fo the country – 300,000 acres across New York, Vermont and New Hampshire – were pilloried by the activists and the foundations who supported them because two-thirds of the land was to remain as working forests, protected in perpetuity by strong conservation easements.

At that time, working forests were not considered good conservation, just some interim step to be tolerated until some permanent form of protection could be brought to bear.

Of course, we had a different view. We looked at working forests, protected by conservation easements, as the penultimate conservation solution because they protected all of the public interest values such as clean water and wildlife habitat while also providing the jobs and tax base necessary to maintain the communities embedded in these large landscapes.

Since then, the world has shifted in our direction, with a majority of organizations supporting working forests because they have seen that the alternative to working forests is not an untouched forest, but rather a housing development or shopping center.

But there is more work to do. Even in my own office we have young people requesting that we go paperless, not understanding the direct connection between robust markets for forest products and the willingness and ability of landowners to keep forests as forests.

You see, our inability to clearly articulate the importance of working forests and what it takes to maintain them is at the heart of our collective failure to align policies and practices toward ensuring that our nation's working forests remain forests.

Advocacy for working forests is as fractured as a mirror that has fallen to the floor, with just as many sharp edges, and the result is that forests are shrinking. From the remote backwoods to groves near small towns: 35 acres here, 500 there. The decline is so incremental it masks a crisis. You wake up one morning and the forest you took for granted has bulldozers tearing up the trees.

13 million acres lost since 1992

Another 23 million acres, or more, projected to be lost by the middle of this century

The pace of the losses is staggering.

And the current economic downturn is no cure. America continues to add 2.7 million people each year, and by the turn of the century we are expected to reach 600 million. Already, we lose about a million and a half acres of forestland each year in this country, and the needs of these new Americans will place even greater stress on what remains.

We need a new narrative, and we need to inject some urgency into its development.

Yet, this too is not without pitfalls. We must be thoughtful about the words we choose, how we frame our argument – because that is what will make all the difference to those that we want to hear our message.

Yes, words matter, and to illustrate, let me tell you a little story:

“Once upon a time there was a lady from right here in Burlington who was rather old-fashioned, always quite delicate and elegant, especially in her language. Last winter, she and her husband were planning a week’s vacation in the south, so she wrote to a particular campground asking for a reservation.

She wanted to make sure the campground was fully equipped, but didn’t quite know how to ask about the toilet facilities. She just couldn’t bring herself to write the word “toilet” in her letter. After much deliberation, she finally came up with the old-fashioned term BATHROOM COMMUNE.

But when she wrote that down, she still thought she was being too forward. So she started all over again, rewrote the entire letter referring to the bathroom commode merely as the BC: “Does the campground have its own BC?” is what she actually wrote.

Well, the campground owner wasn’t old-fashioned at all and when he got the letter, he just couldn’t figure out what the woman was talking about. That BC business really stumped him. After worrying about it for awhile, the campground owner finally came to the conclusion that the lady must be asking about the local Baptist Church, so he sat down and wrote the following reply:

Dear Madam:

I regret very much the delay in answering your letter, but I now take pleasure in informing you that a BC is located nine miles north of the campground and is capable of seating 250 people at one time. I admit it is quite a distance away, if you are in the habit of going regularly, but no doubt you will be pleased to know that a great number of people take their lunches along and make a day of it. They usually arrive early and stay late.

The last time my wife and I went was six years ago, and it was so crowded we had to stand up the whole time we were there. It may interest you to know that right now a supper is planned to raise money to buy more seats. They are going to hold it in the basement of the BC. I would like to say it pains me very much not to be able to go more regularly, but it surely is no lack of desire on my part. As we grow old, it seems to be more of an effort, particularly in cold weather.

If you do decide to come down to our campground, perhaps I could go with you the first time you go, sit with you, and introduce you to all the other folks. This is a very friendly community.”

As I said, words matter. And so, today, I’d like to propose a new way of talking about forests that I will help to elevate them to a much higher level of discourse when it comes to policy decisions, funding and citizen support.

Forests are infrastructure.

Not forests as wilderness, not forests as parks, not forests as sanctuaries for wildlife, or forests for recreation. Not even forests as fiber supply.

But forests as infrastructure.

Just like our rail lines, fiber optic cables and the interstate highway system, I suggest that forests are an essential part of our nation’s infrastructure, and we should start investing in them accordingly.

Listen to what, Peter Kilborn, a writer for the New York Times, said about the nation’s highways back in 2001:

“The 46,000-mile network of limited-access roads that make up the Interstate System is a linear economy-on-wheels, a distinct and self-sustaining 51st state, in a sense, that generates life and commerce . . .”

What a marvelous description – a linear economy on wheels...a distinct and self-sustaining 51st state.

Our nation’s working forests should be considered our 52nd state – a self-sustaining 400 million-acre economy in green that provides us with clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, carbon sinks to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and a source of renewable energy - not to mention the more than 2 million jobs that depend on them.

It is profoundly disturbing to see Congress’s current treatment of infrastructure – branding all investments as waste and ridiculing any program that contemplates investing for the future.

This is government at its worst – shortsighted and shallow. America cannot cut its way to greatness, and the private sector cannot shoulder alone the burden of rebuilding our critical infrastructure. These investments benefit us all – clean air, clean water, energy independence, good jobs - and are precisely the kinds of investments that we should be making right now.

Congress’s behavior reminds me of the time that Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip.

After a good meal, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. Holmes said: “Watson, look up and tell me what you see”.

Watson said: “I see a fantastic panorama of countless stars”.

And Holmes said: “And what does that tell you?”

Watson pondered a moment, and then, not wanting to disappoint his intellectually superior companion, said: Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. And meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.”

“Why Holmes? – What does it tell you?”

Holmes was silent for a moment then spoke: “Someone has stolen our tent.”

You see, like Watson, we tend not to notice our infrastructure until we have a problem.

As a nation, we didn’t acknowledge that our bridges were crumbling until one fell into the Mississippi River. We didn’t worry about the loss of 90% of the wetlands along the Louisiana coast until New Orleans was nearly wiped out. And we didn’t seem to care that our electrical grid was terribly outdated until the northeast was blacked out.

If it had been raining, Watson surely would have noticed his tent was gone, and we need to recognize the critical importance of working

forests before they are gone and the services they provide are no longer available.

Consider the city of Atlanta, which cut down and paved over the forests that provide its groundwater recharge and didn't think twice about it until it came within 90 days of running out of water. Today, the city is buying up developed land, tearing out the pavement and replanting forests at a cost of more than \$500,000 an acre, when they could have protected the forests in the first place for about \$500 an acre.

Forests are indeed infrastructure,

The good news is that most Americans have already accepted the fact that we need to invest mightily in our nation's infrastructure.

In a recent national poll, a near unanimous 94% of Americans were concerned about our nation's infrastructure. Fully 84% of the public wants more money spent to improve America's infrastructure. And here's the kicker: a majority of Americans said they were prepared to pay 1% more in taxes if that's what the money was used for.

Our challenge is to make sure that working forests are included in the mix.

Perhaps we should take a page out of the farmer's playbook. Beginning in the 1950s, our nation's two million farmers began to speak about food independence as a key component of national security, and I don't need to remind any of you how much money is invested in agriculture through the Farm Bill each year.

There are only two million farmers in this country and yet their clout is enormous.

There are over 10 million private forestland owners, and yet we command only a fraction of the nation's attention. We need to come together and speak with one voice about the need for strong markets, reducing regulatory risk, favorable tax policy and dedicated public funding.

We need to reframe our conversations about forests to include water security, energy independence and jobs here at home, for these too are parts of national security.

And there is something else we must do as well. You see, before we can ask the American people to invest more in forests, we first need to convince them that those forests are, and will be, well managed - and that's where forest certification comes in.

Certification provides the public a window into the forest, and it provides them with independent assurance that certified forests are managed well. And, it is working.

Certification has fundamentally changed the way forests are managed here in North America - SFI alone has certified nearly 200 million acres in North America and trained more than 130,000 loggers – a record of success that no other system can match.

These achievements are in part why I came back to the SFI Board and now serve once again in a leadership position. I say came back because this is my second tour of duty on the Board. I was an inaugural member of the Board of SFI, and served two years as Chair of the Board before rotating off.

I came back to the Board because SFI is making a real difference on the ground. I came back because the vast majority of the world's forests are not yet certified. I came back because there is so much more to do to make sure we do not lose millions of acres of working forests in this country.

These are the great challenges we face, and are what I and all my colleagues at The Conservation Fund and on the SFI Board are dedicated to addressing.

One thing I did not come back for, however, was to waste countless hours responding to the steady stream of falsehoods being spread about SFI.

And yet, this is exactly what we see over and over again from the activist community. Facts imagined. Claims made.

Well, what is to be done about it?

Adlai Stevenson once said, "I offer my opponents a bargain: if they will stop telling lies about us, I will stop telling the truth about them."

But my kids had a better idea. They love to watch this show on TV called Myth Busters, maybe you have seen it, where the stars of the show often debunk common myths, using good science and demonstration projects.

So we and a number of other independent research organizations such as Dovetail Partners and the Pinchot Institute went to the published literature, conducted side-by-side analyses, looked at the results of certification audits, and reviewed the certification standards themselves and the results are stunning, and very damning to the credibility of the campaign activists.

For instance clearcutting. FSC and its proxies have perpetuated a perception in the marketplace that FSC does not allow clearcuts, and yet this simply is not true. All certification standards allow for the responsible use of clearcuts. FSC Canada's own National Boreal Standard which represents 25% of FSC-certified lands globally has no maximum clearcut size restrictions. None.

And yet, the following two quotes are on websites offering advice to consumers on green products:

From Home Renovations..."If your counters are made from wood certified by FSC you can rest assured it was not the product of clearcutting".

And from InfoBarrel...”Paper that is FSC certified means that there’s no clearcutting”.

These statements are patently false.

And what about plantations?

Another myth in the marketplace is that FSC prohibits certification of plantations. This too is false.

FSC International’s own website states that plantations account for more than 8 million hectares or about 7% of the total acreage certified to FSC globally, primarily in Brazil, South Africa and the U. K.

And FSC US gets around the thorny problem of certifying plantations by simply stating that traditional plantation forestry in the U. S. does not have to meet FSC’s requirements because they are treated in the FSC US Standard the same as natural forests!

And what about the statement that FSC is the ‘gold standard’ of forest certification?

The reality is that there is no FSC Standard used globally. There are over 28 different FSC Standards in use around the world, and that there are 86 million acres of FSC-certified lands worldwide – 25% of all FSC certified lands – that are certified to draft or interim standards, not

fully approved standards. In contrast, SFI is a single standard - no exceptions.

Additionally, the internationally accepted ‘golden rule’ in standardization is that a standard must be approved and issued by a standards development organization with a date indicating when it becomes valid.

This ‘golden rule’ is respected by all national and international standardization institutions that are members of the International Organization for Standardization (or ISO), the International Accreditation Forum and others, and yet FSC operates outside of any of these organizations while SFI is endorsed by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification which is based fully on ISO and IAF rules and guidelines.

John Burroughs said “To treat your facts with imagination is one thing. To imagine your facts is another.”

The kind of behavior we see out of the activist community represents a profound crisis in leadership.

It is time for the foolishness to stop. Dishonesty, even in the service of something you care deeply about, is still lying.

I have worked in conservation for nearly 30 years and I have never seen such dishonest behavior – from groups like Forest Ethics, to the Forest

Stewardship Council, to the funders who support their campaigns. Saying things that you know to be untrue, remaining silent while your proxies promulgate untruths, quietly sponsoring the perpetuation of untruths – all represent a level of professional misconduct that is appalling.

Enough. It is past time for all who care about the future of forests and the protection of all the many values that forests represent, to stand up and demand a change. Monopolies are not good for any market, including forest certification. Competition produces a race to the top. SFI welcomes FSC into the marketplace. That is how it should be...let the market decide. But stop the lying. It destroys integrity, diminishes people's confidence in certification as a whole and ultimately only serves to accelerate the loss of the productive forestland that we all claim to care so much about.

We face great challenges in conservation today – the very premises of environmental regulation and public funding are under attack, and if we are not careful, we will lose them for years to come. These are the issues real environmental leaders are focused on.

And by the way, it would be a mistake to think this lack of leadership is solely the purview of activists.

Too many corporate leaders give in at the first sign of pressure, allowing company policy to drift weakly on the current called “risk avoidance”.

A friend of mine, watching corporate behavior of late, told me he was thinking of opening a new consulting practice that he called ‘capitulation counseling’. I fear that his new business would do well.

Think about the absurdity of saying FSC only in terms of paper. As you know full well, fiber for many products is sourced from multiple sources, which means that it is possible to have a product that is labeled as FSC certified even though it actually has more fiber from SFI sources!

Leadership means standing up for what is right, not for what is expedient.

Across the board, we can and must do better.

To our elected officials I say, it is time to invest in our future - time to invest in those things that are essential if we are to remain a great nation - energy, education, transportation, technology – and yes, forests.

Allowing our nation’s working forests to be destroyed in the name of economic development is bad policy, bad economics and bad planning.

It is the ultimate disinvestment in America, and we deserve better.

To our corporate leaders I say: Stiffen your spine.

Of late, too many fail this basic test of leadership. Companies that bow to activist pressure without even bothering to determine what is true and what is not do a disservice to all the companies that take the core value of ‘Honesty and Integrity’ seriously. SFI is a great program and you should start acting that way.

And finally to my brethren in the environmental movement, I say ‘Grow up!’ The world can no longer afford your petulance.

You cannot be pro-jobs and anti-business at the same time. You cannot love employees and hate employers.

It is time for you to peel back your fear of, even contempt for the marketplace.

If well managed forests are the goal, then we should all be celebrating the remarkable victory of having hundreds of millions of acres of forests across North America certified.

Folks, we need to focus on the bigger picture, the bigger challenges we face with respect to working forests – such as whether or not we will have forests to manage in the future, and whether or not we can bring into certification the vast majority of the world’s forests that currently are not certified.

These are goals worth fighting for. And we need all hands on deck.

But there is another goal we need to speak about this morning – the goal of reconnecting young people to the natural world around them so that future generations will be prepared to inherit and be good stewards of the legacy of forested lands we have spent our lives creating.

You see, over the past 30 years, children of the digital age have become increasingly alienated from the natural world with disturbing implications, not only for their physical fitness, but also for their long-term mental and spiritual health, and of course, for the environment.

Young people who grow up without spending time in nature are much less likely to be strong champions of the environment when they reach voting age. Twenty or thirty years from now, we will have a generation of leaders in our public, private and nonprofits institutions who will be asked to make policy and budgetary decisions about forests and wetlands who have never seen a forest, or waded a stream.

Kids today have access to an unprecedented array of media in their homes and in their bedrooms. While opening up a wealth of “virtual” experiences to the young, these technologies have made it easier and easier for children to spend less time outside.

Wall Street calls this progress. But if that’s true, then Ogden Nash was right when he said, “Progress may have been a good thing at one time, but it went on a little too long.”

Just the other day, I passed a giant billboard from IKEA that read “Kids, go play inside!” What does it say about our priorities as a

society when we choose to market clever furniture in place of clever kids? When we will drive miles out of our way to buy free range chicken but are too busy or too scared to encourage free range children?

There is a dullness in our young people today because they have lost the spark that comes from interacting with the world around them. It is time we reclaimed the higher ground.

But how do we get there from here? Martin Luther King said that the success of any social movement depends on its ability to “show a world where people will want to go.”

But where is that?

You and I may want to go to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge or the canyons of Zion National Park. But for a child in East Philadelphia, East St. Louis or East L. A., it may be someplace entirely different.

In fact, it may be the abandoned lot next door -- New York City has over 47,000 vacant land parcels totaling thousands of acres.

For decades, these have been considered liabilities, to be fenced off, avoided. What a waste. Where is the vision, the creativity in that?

Mark Twain said “you cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.”

I prefer Agatha Christie’s outlook better.

You see, she was married to one of the preeminent archaeologists of her time. Once when she was asked what’s it like to be married to an archaeologist, she replied...”It’s wonderful! The older I get, the more interested he is in me!”

She was clever enough to see her age as an asset rather than a liability. And we need to be clever enough to recognize that New York City with its 47,000 abandoned lots has an amazing asset just waiting to be deployed.

This brings up a central point in our efforts to reconnect children with nature. As we become more of an urban nation, and as the demographics of our country continue to change, reconnecting children with nature will be less about bringing kids to nature, and more about bringing nature to the kids.

Taking an inner city kid from Washington, D. C. to Yellowstone is a bit like sending her to the moon for a week. It is too big a leap. We need to bring nature to these kids in a way that makes sense to them. Then, later, after they have developed a connection, a love for nature, we can make our way to Yellowstone.

By the year 2050, 85% of Americans will live in cities, and for the first time in history, we will be a majority, minority country. If we are to make nature relevant to these Americans, then we must recognize the value, not only of our national forests and wildlife refuges, but also of our neighborhood parks, wooded cul-de-sacs, and abandoned lots that have yet to be restored.

For too long, we in the environmental movement have defined nature in terms of wildness, far away and pristine. And the result is that nature has become a foreign country that we get to visit only once in a while. That will never do.

Nature must be nearby, accessible. It must be returned to our day care centers, our schools and our communities. We need to rethink our priorities and remake our culture – and that is a tall order indeed.

Consider this, there are 20 million diabetics in this country today; there will be 40 million in 2015; and, if we don't change course, 80 million in the year 2050!

Already, we spend over \$2 trillion each year on health care with 95% of that spent on direct medical service – and only 5% allocated to preventing disease and promoting health and a healthy lifestyle.

The implications for the country are severe – from a health perspective, to the impact on local, state and national budgets, to corporate competitiveness, to the future of our magnificent land and water legacy.

We need to rethink our approach to wellness and health – nature as the 1st prescription rather than the last.

For example, we know that patients in rooms with tree views have shorter hospitalizations and that children with ADHD who have access to natural areas are calmer and require less medication.

And we know that the presence of trees outside apartment buildings in a public housing project in inner-city Chicago predicted better coping skills, less crime and less violence.

And finally, we know that among children who play in paved over playgrounds, the leaders tend to be the most physically mature; while among children who play on green playgrounds, the leaders tend to be the most creative.

Remember, these are the future leaders of our country. With all the complexity in the world today, from global warming, to free trade and immigration, to ethnic and religious intolerance, do we really believe we can lead based on strength alone?

All Americans care about these issues. They may come to the table for different reasons, but they want a seat at the table. And we need to set a place for them. Poor people, people of color, people with disabilities, and others who have the least access to natural settings, and who may need it the most. As a nation, we will be paid back many times over.

**My favorite lapel button says simply “The meek are getting ready.”
Now I’m not sure if the meek will inherit the earth, but I am sure young
people will. And you need to help them get ready.**

**As I travel across all 50 states, too often I witness a culture of
confrontation, rather than collaboration. Too often I am reminded of
John Gardner’s phrase “The war of the parts against the whole”.**

Over fears of liability, we post ‘No Running’ signs in county parks.

**Over fears that our children may encounter a sociopath, we encourage
sedentary, anti-social behavior by allowing our kids to spend hours in
front of an electronic screen.**

**And over fears of nature itself, we quarantine kids under virtual house
arrest, thereby ensuring that they too will fear the very thing they need
the most.**

**For tens of thousands of years, kids went outside and played in nature,
and we are reversing that in a matter of decades. The area beyond
which children are free to roam has shrunk by 89% in the past 20 years.
It simply doesn’t add up.**

**We need a Children’s Bill of Rights that is explicit about the freedom to
explore and improvise, about the right to experience nature in a
meaningful way. If the world of our future, with all its complexity, will**

demand people who are able to understand and adapt, who have creativity and compassion, can we afford anything less?

In the Declaration of Independence, it says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. With all we know about the benefits of nature to children’s health, cognitive ability and socialization, shouldn’t access to nature be an unalienable right?

In my career, I have had the privilege of visiting with farmers, ranchers, forestland owners, hunters, fishers, and people who just like to walk in the woods.

And I have listened to citizens in small towns and big cities; in red states and blue. And while we have many differences, we share one thing in common – a love for the land.

The rancher on the Rocky Mountain Front who wants to pass on the family operation to his children, the woodlot owner in Georgia who has nurtured her forest for a generation in order to send her child to college, the grandfather on the Chesapeake Bay who wants to take his daughter duck hunting for the first time, and the urban teacher in Los Angeles who, desperate for some respite from the stress of the city, just wants to take her class to the park down the street.

These are the lands that have shaped us as a people and defined us as a nation. They provide us with clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and support millions of jobs. They teach us who we are by preserving where we have been.

They are not some kind of amenity, something that is nice to have; they are a necessity, something that we must have, and we should invest in them accordingly. They are part of the critical infrastructure of the country.

One hundred and fifty years ago, President Lincoln transformed this country by beginning a transcontinental railroad during a time of war.

And in 1944, FDR's GI Bill allowed millions of Americans to attend college and become the source of our technological and intellectual power.

And in 1956, President Eisenhower launched the Interstate Highway System, creating millions of jobs and a suburban economy still basic to the United States.

We need this kind of leadership now. Whether it is the National Infrastructure Bank proposed in the Senate, or President Obama's proposal to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, it is time for Congress to recognize that great nations invest for the future,

and that our forests and ranches, civil war battlefields and urban parks, all are appropriate and necessary recipients of public funds.

This is what every member of the environmental movement should be focused on. The activist community continues to fight while together we lose more than a million acres of forest every year in this country. Winning the battle but losing the war is no victory.

In today's highly polarized environment when it seems there is no room for compromise, getting agreement on this may seem out of reach, but that is what leadership is all about.

Christopher Reeve, the actor, who had on the wall of his room when he was in rehab a picture of the space shuttle blasting off, autographed by every astronaut then at NASA. On top of the picture it said "We found nothing is impossible".

And Reeve said, "That should be our motto. Not a Democratic motto, not a Republican motto, but an American motto. Because it's not something one party can do alone. It's something we as a nation must do together.

"So many of our dreams at first seem impossible", he said. "Then they seem improbable. And then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable."

Vast landscapes of working forests and vibrant communities that are connected to them - it is time we began to speak of these things as if they are not only possible, but inevitable.

This is a vision for a great nation.

Thank you for inviting me to be here with you this morning, it has been a real privilege.