

Message Points on Cooperative Conservation

New Model of Conservation

--The three-day conference will launch a new conservation dialogue and philosophy for the 21st Century that builds upon the legacy of a much similar convocation of leaders by President Theodore Roosevelt at the start of the last century.

--The White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation is designed with dozens of concurrent sessions featuring private/public partnerships for conservation. The entire agenda is meant to drive home a point: Conservation today is no longer about conflict. Instead, it's about cooperation—about partnerships—about collaborative solutions from the bottom up.

What Conservation Means

--Conservation is about cooperation with your neighbors—with people from your community—with people who live with you on landscapes that you all share—that you all depend on for a living. It's about respect for each other and about dignity and equality as you work together toward some common goals.

--The great conservationist Aldo Leopold, even before he coined the term “land ethic,” wrote in the 1930s of the need for cooperative conservation on America's farms. He used that very term. He argued that the future of conservation depended on private landowners and that looking too much to government for solutions could be a distraction.

A New Vision of Conservation

--USDA has embraced an alternative vision of conservation—one more consistent with Aldo Leopold's vision. It's based on the belief that those who depend on the land to make a living have a vested interest in its sound, sustainable stewardship. As President Bush has said, “Stewardship is the daily work of America's farmers and those who own the land.” It's a vision of cooperative conservation—of working with our farmers and ranchers and our timber producers and forest landowners instead of against them.

--In our vision of cooperative conservation, government has a strong role to play—not as a top-down regulator of everything that happens, but rather as an enabler and facilitator of community-based collaborative approaches from the bottom up. It's about both improving the environment and strengthening the economy by helping people help the land.

--Toward that end, we've made some good progress in recent years, including restoring forest health; recovering wetlands; and protecting working farms, forests, and ranches from development.