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AUGUST 28, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Vail, Colorado)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED AT YELLOWSTONE
NATIONAL PARK

OLD FAITHFUL LODGE

Next weekend, Labor Day, 1976, marks the end of a glorious summer. It means one more carefree holiday before we all go back to school, back to work, back to the duties we must do to build better lives for ourselves, our children and our country.

For many families, it means one last chance to get out of doors, out of town, out into the sun and under the stars, close to nature's beauty and nature's creatures. For me, this is a moment I've been looking forward to for a long, long time -- a unique opportunity to return to Yellowstone where I spent one of the greatest summers of my life.

Being a seasonal Park Ranger was one of the most challenging jobs I had after graduating from Michigan. Looking back it seems more like fun than hard work, though we had plenty of both. I guess I've been talking about that summer ever since. Maybe I overdid the bedtime stories about my fire-fighting escapades and encounters with the bears.

Family vacations in the outdoors, especially among the majestic mountains of the West, are a tradition in our family. My own parents used to take my brothers and me to the lakes and woods of Michigan even before I was big enough to go myself as a Boy Scout. There's something about the wide open spaces that is a necessity for Americans. Being alone with nature strengthens our love for one another and for our country. For those who live close to the land, this is nothing new. But as more and more Americans live in cities and densely populated areas, the lure of the mountains and the beaches and the rivers and the lakes becomes more and more compelling.

It has done wonders for me to spend a few days in Colorado and to come back to Yellowstone, and I hope it has for you. But I have a serious as well as sentimental reason for this visit. This has been a glorious summer, the summer of our Bicentennial, one we will remember all our lives. This Fourth of July turned out to be a profound experience for millions of Americans. Amid the fireworks and parades, the tall ships and the pilgrimages to historic shrines, in our joyous celebration of 200 years as one Nation, under God, we found new meaning for the words freedom, equality, and unity.

Somehow, despite our difficulties and our differences -- perhaps because of them -- Americans recaptured and rekindled the essential spirit and greatness that make us a special kind of people. We realized what a wonderful thing it is to be an American. As I thought about the changes that have taken place in this great country, not only in the last two years but over the last two centuries, I also thought about those things that must never change. Those unchanging things are what really make us Americans, and they are the things we must preserve and pass on to future generations. Some are intangible, invisible -- our deep religious and moral convictions, our bonds of family and community, our political values embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

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But we have other common treasures that are material and visible, that can be damaged and destroyed by man. We must be equally committed to conserve and cherish our incomparable natural heritage--our wildlife, our air, our waters and our land itself.

More than a century ago, we began to systematically save our natural heritage for the enjoyment of future Americans with the National Park System of which Yellowstone is the oldest and largest example. This year alone we expect some 260 million visitors to enjoy our 287 national parks that spread from the Virgin Islands and Maine to Alaska and Hawaii.

But I am sure there are times when some of you thought all 260 million were gathered in one campsite. We have had a wonderful Bicentennial. We celebrated what our patriot founders and our immigrant ancestors handed down to us. We renewed our vows to their vision of freedom and equality. But I found myself asking: Can't we do more?

Can't we do something special as our Bicentennial birthday present to the next generation and future generations; a gift that will still be remembered gratefully 100 years from now? I believe we can.

I am therefore proposing, and call upon this generation of Americans to support a 10 year program to double America's heritage of national parks, recreation areas, wildlife refuges, urban parks and historic sites.

I will send to the Congress Tuesday a Bicentennial Land Heritage Act which includes a commitment of one and a half billion dollars during the next decade:

- to more than double our present acreage of land for parks, recreation areas and wildlife refuges;
- to begin development of these new lands and make them accessible, usable and enjoyable;
- to improve existing facilities and increase the number of dedicated personnel at existing National Parks;
- to provide \$200 million to be available for urban parks that bring the benefits of nature to those who live in our cities;
- and to accelerate the development of parklands and refuges which have had to be delayed for lack of manpower and money.

This initial commitment may mean we will have to trim some waste and tighten our belts elsewhere but it is the soundest investment I can envision in the future of America. We must act now to prevent the loss of treasures that can never be replaced for ourselves, our children and for future generations of Americans.

This is a big job, one that requires government action at all levels. But like most of the big jobs Americans undertake, it cannot be left to government alone. In the past, the cause of land conservation has been advanced and supported by many concerned citizens, companies and private organizations. The Rockefeller family, represented here today by Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Rockefeller, is an outstanding example of this dedication. I thank them and all such far-sighted Americans for their generous contributions to our National Park System and the preservation of our priceless natural heritage.

I call upon all Americans, our Bicentennial generation which has enjoyed the blessings of liberty and the pursuit of happiness, ours for 200 years, to join in a great new undertaking to improve the quality of our lives and of our land.

I remember the great American poet, Robert Frost as he stood on the steps of the United States Capitol on that snowy day in 1961 when President Kennedy was inaugurated, reciting his moving lines: "The land was ours before we were the land's. She was our land more than a hundred years before we were her people." I remember even longer ago, 40 years ago, standing on Inspiration Point and looking out over this beautiful portion of our land. I said to myself how lucky I was that my grandparent's generation had the vision and foresight to save it for us. Now it is our turn to make our own gift outright to those who will come after us, 15 years, 40 years, 100 years from now. I want to be as faithful to my grandchildren's generation as Old Faithful has been to ours. What better way can we begin our Third Century of freedom?

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