

388 Special Message to the Congress on the Nation's Land and Water Resources. *January 19, 1953*

*To the Congress of the United States:*

As I leave the office of President, I should like to call to the attention of the Congress several recent actions designed to provide a better basis for the development of our water and related land resources.

These resources are a foundation, upon which rest our national security, our ability to maintain a democratic society, and our leadership in the free world. All too frequently their significance has been obscured among the dramatic events which have characterized our time.

Realizing the importance of properly planned water resource development, in 1950 I appointed a special commission to recommend a consistent and forward-looking national policy for the conservation, development and use of our water and related land resources. This was the Water Resources Policy Commission, under the chairmanship of Mr. Morris L. Cooke.

The Commission reported to me in 1951. Their report has been under careful and detailed study by the Executive Branch agencies since then. I now am transmitting formally the Commission's report to the Congress for its consideration in treating problems of resource development. I believe that the report is of great value. The Commission's understanding of cooperative effort in the American system, its clarification of the complex problems of multiple-purpose planning, its detailed professional analysis of water management, and its recognition of the broad public interest make the report an important public document.

The general studies of the Commission will shortly be supplemented by specific field studies of resource development in three major regions of the country. After Congress authorized the basic surveys in 1950, I established Federal interagency committees to study the New England-New York region and the Arkansas-White-Red Basins. Those

committees were organized and they have been at work for two and a half years. They will report upon the multiple-purpose development of those regions next year. The committees have been directed to draw upon the experience and ideas of the people of the regions to the greatest extent possible. The committees also have been directed to present fully coordinated recommendations for all the purposes served by water and land development. The Governors of the affected States or their representatives are participating in the committee work, and their views will be reflected in these reports.

In 1952, I appointed a bi-partisan Missouri Basin Survey Commission to assemble the facts and report its judgments upon the proper procedure for further development in that vast territory. The report of this Commission will be available within a few weeks. The Commission, which is composed of Members of Congress and leading citizens of the Missouri Basin, has conducted intensive hearings throughout the Basin States. This Commission's report will be based on first-hand expressions by the people of the Basin of their views on the future development of this vital region in the heart of our country.

Thus we shall soon have three important additional field checks for particular regions upon the desirable pattern of development for each area.

These studies have been undertaken against a background of great accomplishment, and in accord with the Nation's well-established tradition of public interest in its water and land resources. I believe them to be in accord with our record of vigorous action to protect the public welfare in river basin development, a record which dates from the first years of this century.

The first real impetus to sensible river basin development came as a part of the "conservation movement" which was led by

President Theodore Roosevelt. He and his advisers realized that the continuing misuse of our natural resources through unbridled private development would seriously endanger the Nation's welfare within a very few generations. His dynamic leadership brought the first real safeguards to assure that benefits from resource development would accrue to all the people, rather than just to special interests. At the same time, he sought to assure permanently productive forests, waters and lands.

During the period prior to the first World War, the Congress also demonstrated a bipartisan interest in publicly beneficial river basin development. Indeed its interest in waterway development and flood control in the nineteenth century marked the beginnings of Federal water policy.

The interest of both the Congress and the Executive Branch in comprehensive treatment of our river basins was reflected in the enactment of laws which established and provided for the administration of the national forests—one main purpose of which was to protect important watersheds which are sources for many streams. It was shown in the enactment of the Reclamation Act of 1902 to provide Federal aid for the development of irrigation on the arid lands of the West. The interest continued, as indicated by passage of the Federal Water Power Act in 1920. That Act required selection of electric power projects or plans which developed and used water resources most efficiently. The interest was further illustrated in the 1927 authorization of the Corps of Engineers "308" reports, which specifically provided for comprehensive planning.

Although the dynamic influence of Theodore Roosevelt was important in the conservation movement, the legislation enacted to conserve and to develop our water and land resources for the most part was broadly supported by both parties. The steps taken were in recognition of the overriding public interest in sound resource management.

The experience of this early period of public action showed that constant vigilance

and competent professional guidance are essential to prevent irreparable losses. In spite of earlier efforts, whole sections of our national resource foundation were crumbling as recently as twenty years ago. We had not yet fully awakened to some of the dangers to national interest which lay in short-sighted private actions. Our lands were disappearing in gale and flood; our streams still were destructive giants unchained.

During the two eventful decades which have followed since 1933, the Nation has undergone some deeply moving experiences, like the appearance of the Great Plains "dust-bowl" which directly or indirectly affected millions of people. In part under the stimulus of catastrophe, but with the advantage of wise counsel during those years, we have changed greatly our attitudes toward using our lands and waters.

We have learned that the mark of a well-managed land lies in the care a Nation gives to its rivers. We have learned that rivers truly can be our servants, harnessed to provide vast additions to our wealth. And as we have learned we have been working to restore the crumbling parts of our resource foundation in a manner which has captured the imagination of the world.

During these years I believe that we demonstrated for all time the efficiency and the humanity of comprehensively planned, multi-purpose river basin development. Compare the Tennessee Valley of 1933, which lacked even hope, with the vigorous region TVA in 1953 is assisting the people to build further. There you now will find several million people who are working aggressively to make the best use of their resources. A unified management of their watershed has helped them to create new opportunities.

Or compare the great dams and thousands of acres of fertile green fields which are beginning to grace eastern Washington State, with the sagebrush and scabland of a few years ago. Look at the great works of the Central Valley, or of the Colorado, which literally move rivers from one basin to an-

other. Look at the great developments which are getting under way on the Missouri and in the Southwest.

No wonder professional visitors from all over the world come to see our works, and to study our ideas. The stream of several thousand professional visitors who come every year to study the Department of Interior's, TVA's, the Department of Agriculture's, and the Corps of Engineers' work is not a matter of chance. Only something solid and stimulating could be so lasting an attraction.

During those twenty years, we have learned the true place of electric power generating facilities in our national life. They are vital to the Nation—physically, economically, socially. We now know they are so vital that never again can we trust to haphazard planning for their construction.

We know that electricity can be produced and sold cheaply; and that when it is so produced, the market for it is of hitherto undreamed size.

We know that large reserves of generating capacity are vital to economic health and to national security.

We know that the public construction of main transmission lines from generators to wholesale distribution points unlocks this generating capacity for the public at large, and eliminates the danger of monopoly.

We know these things because we had the foresight to commence multiple-purpose river development.

TVA proved a lot of these things to us, and our works in other parts of the country have confirmed and extended that proof. I need hardly remind you that without the electricity of the TVA and Bonneville systems, which resulted from Federal multiple-purpose development, we should not have had enough aluminum for planes, and we should not have had the timely atomic energy program of the last World War. In fact those two public power systems are still the energy life-lines for that greatest development of our time.

We have learned much more. We now

know that fertilizer can be produced and sold more cheaply than it was in the past. That can be done through having low-cost electric power in the right place, as for the huge phosphate deposits of the Pacific Northwest. Or it can come through new processes, as have been developed by TVA. Both means help us to produce more food and clothing. And the fertilizer has been made to help the upstream farmer keep his soil on his farm. That is where the soil belongs, and not in the flooded basements and on the warehouse floors of valley cities.

We have learned that private citizens—farmers, ranchers, forest owners—in their own interest as well as that of the Nation, should plan the use of the resources they control so that those resources will be more fruitful as the years go by. All across our country individuals and private companies have demonstrated the value and the practicality of effective conservation in the daily management of their own enterprises.

We have learned that the farmer can have electricity in his dairy barn and his wife can electrify her kitchen—at rates which he can afford.

We have learned that small towns can compete with cities for the location of industry and factory jobs without having the disadvantage of high electricity rates, and without the disadvantage of high transportation rates for their materials and goods. Frequently dams which produce electricity also make it possible for vessels to move at low cost on a river.

We have learned that the advantages of flood control can be extended on a large scale through multiple-purpose reservoirs and watershed improvements, aiding town and farm alike.

All these now nationally acknowledged benefits of comprehensive river basin development were little but the vision of a few foresighted men twenty years ago. But they were visions which had existed for many years before we were able to act upon them. I hope that the demonstration we now have before us will never be forgotten,

nor its significance lost sight of.

I am happy to report that we have made impressive additions to our resource foundation during my Administration. We have continued on the programs which were so well started in previous years.

Since 1945, we have added about 2,700,000 irrigated acres to our farm lands. By the middle of 1953, works constructed by the Federal Government will be supplying irrigation water to 135,000 farm units in the West. Several million additional acres would be irrigated under projects which have been authorized by the Congress but not yet constructed.

Since 1945, also, we have made substantial progress toward the protection of our many valleys from disastrous floods. We have provided additional flood control on the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Columbia, in New England, the Southwest and California, and in the mid-Atlantic States. We have made encouraging progress on the vast works for control of the giant Missouri, probably our most important remaining problem in river development. Between 1945 and 1953, about three million acres of valley land were given flood protection. Works now under way will provide protection to an additional 7,600,000 acres. Three hundred and fifty communities and 2,700,000 people are located in the areas which will be protected.

In this period, we have continued to improve our navigable waterways. We now have 28,600 miles of them, 11,100 miles to a depth of nine feet or more. They are important parts of the Nation's transportation system, and their use has increased greatly in these years.

We have continued our soil conservation program. In these last eight years 1,296 new Soil Conservation Districts were formed. This addition nearly doubled the number of such districts in the country.

Our additions to the country's means of producing and distributing electric energy have also been great in this period. During these eight years, the Federal Government alone has constructed five million kilowatts

of generating capacity. This has increased the size of our public power systems by fifty percent. Further ultimate capacity of 10.6 million kilowatts will be added when we complete projects now in construction.

Since 1945, we have constructed 12,200 miles of main transmission lines. They assure widespread benefits to the people from public power.

Through the direct efforts of the Rural Electrification Administration since 1945, we have brought electricity to one and one-half million farms which never before had it. More than eighty-eight percent of our farms now are electrified, as compared to forty-six percent in January 1945. Through the lines constructed by the Department of the Interior and the TVA we also have brought the benefits of low-rate public power to sixty-five additional municipalities.

I have not the slightest doubt that these works, by the example they gave as well as the electricity they delivered, were an important reason for the small change in our rates for electric service throughout the Nation during this period when many prices rose sharply. Since 1945, during a period when private utilities have experienced unprecedented prosperity, national average residential and commercial electric rates actually have decreased, and industrial rates have increased less than ten percent. Compare that to the general rate increase of almost eighty percent authorized in the same period for rail freight rates. Without multiple-purpose river basin development, I believe that few of these accomplishments would have been possible.

I have been privileged to see during this Administration the beginning or completion by our Federal Government of great dams, gigantic irrigation enterprises, huge generating stations, and other monuments which will stand as symbols of the truths about water and land developments we have now accepted as a Nation.

I might speak of the engineering accomplishments alone: The Corps of Engineers' McNary Dam on the Columbia, the Bureau

of Reclamation's Grand Coulee irrigation diversion in Washington, and its Hungry Horse Dam in Montana, the Corps' Ft. Randall Dam on the Missouri; and TVA's Shawnee steam plant, to be the largest in the world. These are among the great engineering accomplishments of all time.

Yet it seems more important to me that all these, and other projects too, are symbols of the things we have learned about efficient, orderly, organized development of river basins.

We built the Bureau of Reclamation's great new Hungry Horse Dam in Montana not as an isolated structure, but as a part of the Columbia Basin system. Its value lies much more in the water it stores for use in a score of places down the long Columbia system than in its own sizeable electricity production.

We are building TVA's Shawnee plant where it is because we want to make the best possible use of the whole TVA electrical system for the development of atomic energy in the interest of our national defense.

This is what we must do for every one of these great works that we plan or build in the future. If we are to use our money and our effort wisely, they must all be planned and built with the full needs of the region and the Nation in mind. Each new structure must be recognized as part of a plant which comprises a whole system of river development. In planning for each function, we must be mindful of its relation to all other purposes.

And we especially must make sure that we safeguard the use of these resources for the benefit of all the people. Where the public monies are invested, the resulting gains must accrue to the public, and not be diverted to the undue benefit of any private group.

As we consider what the Nation has done, and what we now know, we must admit that we still have much to do. But a great deal will depend on the way we do it. We now are at a stage where we can capitalize on the extensive groundwork which has been laid

for unified planning and management and multiple-purpose development of our regional water and land resources.

There are many reasons why we should take steps as soon as possible to improve further our resource development policy and administrative machinery, and why we must modernize Federal Government techniques which determine the speed, justice and efficiency we can muster for this work.

The national investment in resource development from all sources has taken a sharp upward turn since the end of the second World War. The Federal Government alone is now spending about a billion dollars a year to help develop our river basins through irrigation, power, flood prevention, navigation, watershed treatment and in other important ways. The Congress has authorized over ten billion dollars of projects for undertaking in the future. However, in the face of this program, Federal organization for carrying out water resources responsibilities remains diffuse, and there is no uniform Congressionally approved Federal water resources policy to govern large parts of this program.

More and more people are beginning to realize the importance of immediate changes to assure wise investment. There is an encouraging tide of rising interest in this hitherto specialized technical field by farmers, businessmen, workmen, civic organizations, and others. Increasingly large volumes of publicity are being given to definite proposals for changed policy and organization; some of these have real merit, and some, if adopted, would be very harmful.

Finally, some of our regions are in need of immediate help. I cannot think of the wasting resources of the Rio Grande Basin, the Arkansas Basin, the Red River, or New England without considering what a unified multiple-purpose program might do for each of them, and in helping them, what it might do for the Nation. These are not jobs for isolated, unrelated single-project development. They demand comprehensive plans for water and land alike. We cannot escape

the obvious relation of such improvements to our national security.

For these reasons I commend to the Congress for its serious attention several lines of action.

First, we should organize more efficient means of regional river basin planning and management in those parts of our country which need such improvement.

The type of organization need not be the same for all regions. The breadth of our land and the number of rivers in it inevitably have given rise to many differing needs. A fixed pattern may not be the sole answer to the problems of all these rivers.

But whatever the outward form, the objectives should be the same. The organizations we decide upon should be strong enough to uphold the peoples' interest in their resources. They should be strong enough to be efficient. They should be strong enough to see that unified multiple-purpose development is planned for, and works operated harmoniously in each basin-wide comprehensive system. Their responsibilities should embrace related land as well as water programs.

The Water Resources Policy Commission recommended in favor of decentralized but unified or coordinated administration for those resource programs. The need for better coordinated basin administration also was recognized by the Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch, which reported earlier to me and to the Congress.

Second, we should increase our efforts to see that every affected State, and every affected community in a region is given opportunity to share in the responsibility for basin development. I think it is a good rule that where States and communities assume a greater share in administrative or planning responsibility, they should also assume greater financial responsibility.

We hear more and more of management and planning by the States from the regions where work now is being done, or is about to be undertaken. But we have found, I

regret to say, that this growing demand for local administrative responsibility, with few exceptions, is not matched by an equal willingness to relieve the Federal Government of financial responsibility for a proportionate share of the required investment. The assumption of greater State and community financial responsibility is one of the ways we can avoid irresponsible special pressure for undesirable projects.

We can view with favor the increasing local awareness of the necessity of planned, cooperative improvement of our streams, but we also must foster an understanding of the huge size of the job. There is much more to it than Federal Government funds are likely to accomplish in a reasonable time.

We must also see that improved Federal organization accompanies increased local and State participation. States and communities cannot cooperate effectively with the agencies of the Federal Government where sharp differences of opinion exist and where machinery for resolving those differences is cumbersome or absent.

Third, we should strengthen and simplify our Federal procedures for selection among the great volume of project proposals which come to the Executive offices and the Congress every year.

It has been estimated that full development of our water and land resources over the years may require the investment of as much as a hundred billion dollars by private citizens and their Government. Not far in the future the mold will be formed which will determine the pattern of works for most of our important regions. Whether or not the investment is to be sound or unsound, for all the people or for a fortunate few, will be decided by what the Federal Government does within a few years.

Thus far we haven't even been able to compare projects on the same basis. There are a number of Federal resource-development laws, and they establish differing procedures and differing standards. We have had to judge irrigation proposals by one standard, flood control by another, pollu-

tion control by a third, and so on. In some cases, we haven't even been able to get the facts as to whether or not benefits will be greater than costs, even though the proponents always assure us of the great value of their particular proposal. You can't make rapid progress without effective means for selecting projects wisely.

I am pleased to report that we have found it possible to move forward by Executive action toward better project selection. With my approval, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget recently has issued a Budget Circular which establishes standards to be used by the Executive office in reviewing all reports on water projects and programs. I believe this Circular is a significant step toward improved evaluation and cost-allocation procedure. But it is only a first step. Many of the problems we encounter result from statutes which can be corrected only by Congressional action.

Furthermore, I suggested in the 1954 Budget Message that Congress might wish to examine its own intricate procedure for reviewing resource proposals. In each House of the Congress, there are several committees and sub-committees which consider different programs and projects, even though many projects are on the same rivers and watersheds. The Congress might find that revision of this structure would have helpful effects upon the now complicated operation of the Executive resource-development agencies.

Fourth, we must find a better answer to the question: "Who pays and how much?" Our present policy was developed piece-meal over more than a century. During most of this period equitable sharing of costs took second place to the need for development. For example, consider our flood control policy. When its main outlines were developed in the 1930's, material, resources and the labor of our citizens were begging to be put to work. Now we face the opposite situation. There are many urgent and competitive uses for materials and manpower.

Our reimbursement policy for all water

development should be reoriented to help us meet these problems. The cost of resource projects should be paid more by those who benefit directly from them. Such a change can have a double effect. It would remove some of the burden for payment from the taxpayer-at-large, and it would make the proposers of projects more careful about investigating the soundness of their ideas. And we should clarify our repayment procedures so that every citizen can learn exactly where his tax dollar has gone, and what chance his Government has of getting it back.

Fifth, we should see that our development procedure is so designed that it can provide the most in farms, and jobs, and opportunity for business enterprise for every dollar spent. With these objectives in mind, we should modernize our laws for promoting additions to cultivable land, and adapt the revision to the needs of the forty-eight States. We should retain the requirements of acreage limitation but we should modernize them, in order to make them a true instrument for encouraging the settlement of family farms. We should further see that balanced industrial employment opportunities and private business opportunities are available, and that Federal resource works are used to provide them wherever and whenever possible and necessary.

Toward these ends the Bureau of the Budget has been preparing legislative proposals for desirable changes in policy and organization. The results of this work will be available to the new Administration.

To the people of the Nation through their representatives in Congress I commend certain objectives toward which the Government should continue to move in our national programs of water and land development.

We should help make available jobs and business opportunities in manufacturing, industry, and trade in the different regions of the country—as they are needed. The Government should help supply the basic needs of private enterprise, including electric

power, water transportation, water supply, and flood-protected industrial sites to make the best use of the resources of each region. It should do this in ways which will encourage the development of the skills and capacities of the people who are there or who may move there.

In the regions where the Federal Government has become an important utility, like the Tennessee Valley, or the Pacific Northwest, the Government should continue to supply new generating plants in adequate number. We must not permit brown-outs, or the turning away of new industry well-suited to these areas.

In developing new generating capacity, and in disposing of public power, we should endeavor to make possible electricity rates which permit all homes to have modern comforts, and which allow farm tasks to be lightened by modern machines.

The Government should continue to help make available new family farms at reasonable prices and on reasonable terms.

The Government should continue to improve its practice of sustained yield management of public lands and forests, and to strongly promote the similar management of private property.

The Government should continue to encourage more local and State responsibility. This does not mean promising the States or communities something for nothing—far from it. Administration by the States of Federally provided dollars alone is not real responsibility. Indeed, full reliance on the Federal Treasury is in anything but the best interest of the community, the State, and the Nation.

This job of getting our land and water developed, I repeat, is so big that we must

enlist the participation of all agencies—Federal, State, community, private enterprise. The results can be timely and economical only if States and communities invest their dollars, as well as the Federal taxpayer.

I report finally, then, that we now have well charted the obstructions to efficient national water resource development of widespread benefit. In doing this we have found much that is good, and I would hold fast to it. But I also believe that a more certain route to these benefits can be planned. When that is done, the Nation can build even more surely and more rapidly than before.

HARRY S. TRUMAN

NOTE: For the President's letter to Morris Cooke informing him of the proposed establishment of the President's Water Resources Policy Commission and asking him to serve as Chairman, see 1950 volume, this series, Item 1. For the President's letter to department and agency heads following publication of the final volume of the Commission's report, see 1951 volume, this series, Item 55.

For the President's letter concerning the establishment of an Interagency Committee To Study the Resources and Development of New England and New York, see 1950 volume, this series, Item 265. The Committee's report is entitled "The Resources of the New England-New York Region" (1955, 46 vols.).

For the White House statement announcing the establishment of the Arkansas-White-Red River Basins Interagency Committee, see 1950 volume, this series, Item 164. The Committee's report is entitled "A Report on the Conservation and Development of Water and Land Resources, Prepared by Federal and State Agencies Under Authorization of Section 205 of the Flood Control Act of 1950" (1955, 23 vols.).

For the President's statement upon signing an Executive order establishing the Missouri Basin Survey Commission, see Item 3, this volume. The Commission's report is entitled "Missouri: Land and Water" (Government Printing Office, 1953, 295 pp.).