

## CONSERVATION

With the adjournment of congress, amongst unfinished business several conservation bills have been buried, to the great satisfaction probably of many of our legislators. A conservation bill is a disagreeable matter to the politicians: with the waste and destruction of so much of our national resources, most of the thinking people have <sup>wakened</sup> ~~wake~~ up to the immediate necessity of conserving what little is left, and effective conservation legislation thus is demanded by the voters - and it is not wise to disregard the wishes of the voters, as they more and more acquire the habit of remembering on election day their congressmen's actions. On the other hand, where power interests are opposed to conservation as it interferes with their business, ~~and~~ it pays the legislator, to listen to them.

Conservation is a wide field, from the preservation of our forests and timber lands, to our mines, navigation and water-powers, our fish and game etc.

However, all the conservation problems can be divided into two very distinct classes, which in my opinion are vastly different in their importance, though this is not generally realized.



First in importance is the conservation of those of our remaining national resources, which would be permanently destroyed, could never be restored, or only by slow work through generations. Such for instance is the preservation of the forests on the water sheds of our rivers. While in some cases the destruction of the forests at the head waters of rivers does not materially change the total amount of water which the river carries down during the year, it enormously affects the uniformity of the river flow, and with the destruction of the forests, periods of destructive freshets alternate with periods of drought, and with rivers as the Connecticut, the Hudson etc. the flow has materially changed during the last twenty-five years, with the resultant interference with navigation by freshet and low water, the depreciation of water powers, and the damage done by inundation. Reforestation means a generation of work, even where it is possible. Many of our southern rivers have by their water powers become the source of prosperity of the new industrial South, feeding the large electric transmission systems, which supply power to factory and mill. Where steep slopes, loose soil and heavy rains lead to erosion after the destruction of the forest, where forest once protected the river flow, only



bare cliffs remain, as we find them in many older countries, and then reforestation is impossible. So also game and fish, once exterminated, like the Buffalo herds of bygone days, can never be restored, and should be protected before it is too late.

This is the class of conservation, which should find little objection, except from utterly selfish business interests, and on this the foremost efforts should be concentrated, and much less opposition should be met than in conservation legislation dealing with the relation of private and public ownership, such as the question of the development of mines and water powers on the national domain.

It is true, most of the mines and water rights have gone into private hands, and it would be very desirable to preserve to the nation the ownership <sup>the</sup> of few, which are still on the national domain. But even if this should not be feasible, what permanent harm could be done? The mines, the water powers would still be developed and made useful, and there are very few people left, who are such extreme individualists, to believe that private property is forever lost to the nation, but the progressive idea is more and more gaining ground, that there is no real private property in public utilities,



but that in the nation is wasted the right and the duty of supervising and controlling public utilities in the public interest, and beyond this, the socialistic doctrine of direct ownership of public utilities is rapidly gaining ground, so that we do not need to fear permanent alienation of national resources, even if they go into private hands.

It is perhaps unfortunate, that in line with our present day tendency against corporations, even in the field of conservation rather more attention is often given to the question of preserving resources from falling into private hands, than to the far more important problem of conserving those resources, which are threatened with permanent damage or destruction, and that hereby an unnecessary opposition against conservation is created from sides, which should rather encourage it.

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