

# Toward an Environmentalist Cabinet

For environmentalists, the end of the Nixon administration has been the best news in memory. For at least the last year, Mr. Nixon was trading off environmental policy for support in the House and Senate. This display of "impeachment politics" threatened to set back environmental gains a decade.

But now there is hope that President Ford, in reorganizing the administration, may appoint a Cabinet more amenable to environmental concerns, and less anxious to blame ecologists for everything from inflation to the "energy crisis." With the exception of Russel Train, head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Russell Peterson, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), administration spokesmen—citing the need to produce more energy at any cost—have waged virtual war on environmentalists. Thus, from a conservation standpoint, any change in the Cabinet will almost certainly result in an improvement.

One of the first priorities of President Ford should be to fill a Cabinet post that has been wanting for some time: the Secretary of the Interior. Although Rogers Morton (now a member of Ford's four-man "transition team") has nominally held this post since 1971, he has, in effect, been functioning more realistically as a co-Secretary of Commerce, rather than as guardian of the nation's resources.

Apart from his primary determination to keep the oil industry happy at any cost, recent actions by Morton have made it difficult to consider him as Interior Secretary in any real sense of the word. For example, in June 1974, Morton caved in to the right wing/land development coalition and opposed effective land use legislation, which he had earlier endorsed and which President Nixon had called the nation's No. 1 environmental priority. The Land Use Bill, passed overwhelmingly by the Senate, was killed in the House by a margin of 211 to 204. A few weeks later, Morton opposed the bills to regulate strip mining that were supported by everyone but the coal industry.

Morton's policies have distressed environmentalists on most other conservation issues. The Alaskan oil pipeline,

pushed by Morton, will destroy much of North America's last remaining wilderness areas. With millions of acres of Alaska now up for grabs, Morton has proposed that some of the best wildlife areas be opened for intensive logging and mineral exploitation.

Interior's Bureau of Land Management is attempting to bring miners and livestock ranchers into several federal wildlife ranges, which would present a grave threat to such imperiled species as bighorn sheep, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, pronghorn antelopes, burrowing owls, bald eagles and other wildlife that inhabit these areas. Interior has also proposed amending the law protecting America's last wild horses to allow a resumption of roundups and slaughter for pet food.

The final straw came Aug. 15, when Morton, addressing Expo '74 in Spo-

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kane on behalf of President Ford, launched a bitter attack on environmentalists. The Ford-Morton speech, written by the Commerce Department and laced with code words, is an ominous indication of the course on which the Ford administration may be embarking.

Partially as a consequence of Morton's lethargic administration, many of Interior's responsibilities for wildlife and endangered species, including seals, whales, dolphins and porpoises, have been transferred to the Commerce Department. Commerce is now headed by Frederick Dent, a South Carolina businessman who had been Mr. Nixon's most unflinching supporter in the Cabinet.

The potential harm of this became apparent recently, when Secretary Dent made it clear that, in making decisions on wildlife, he plans to consider his mandate to "foster and promote domestic and international

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trade." As a result, Commerce is now in the process of undoing many of the conscientious measures it has adopted over the last few years.

Recently, the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), after a lengthy and intensive study, determined that, under the law, the Fouke (fur) Company of Greenville, S.C., had to be denied its request to import up to 70,000 baby sealskins each year from South Africa and Namibia (Southwest Africa). However, instead of following this recommendation (which was concurred in by the Marine Mammal Commission), Dent, at the urging of Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), dispatched an official team on Aug. 7 to South Africa and Namibia to observe the seal kill, in preparation for a possible waiver of the moratorium on commercial imports of such products. This was done despite the fact that international law and United States foreign policy generally prohibit the sending of official missions to Namibia because of South Africa's illegal control of that area.

The result of Dent's decision was to undercut the Marine Mammal Protection Act and U.S. foreign policy. (Ironically, the team found that the killing of the seals was inhumane, forcing Dent to deny Fouke's request, despite his determination to grant a waiver of the moratorium.)

Under Dent, Commerce has also pushed for amendments to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 which would seriously undermine their effectiveness. Commerce has urged Congress to weaken these laws to allow the interstate commerce of certain products from whales and other endangered species, and to permit the United States tuna fleet to continue killing over 100,000 dolphins each year, a practice that the law requires to be substantially terminated by October.

Other Cabinet officers who would be placed high on any environmental "enemies list" are Roy Ash, head of

the Office of Management and Budget, and Earl Butz, Secretary of Agriculture. Ash has consistently cut off funds urgently needed for conservation projects. Ash recently cut \$4 million from an Interior Department request to acquire critical habitat areas of several of the most seriously endangered species in the United States. He later refused to allow Interior to request an additional \$6 million to buy up rapidly disappearing marsh and wetlands essential for ducks, geese and other wildlife.

Nor would conservationists lament the departure of Butz. An advocate of production whatever the damage to the environment, he has presided over the reintroduction of DDT in the Northwest, which may have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of songbirds—and the accelerated timber cutting program in the national forests being carried out by his department's agency, the United States Forest Service.

In the atmosphere created by this administration, it is not surprising that even EPA has begun to buckle under to the pressure. EPA has gone along with a reinstatement of DDT spraying and the cyanide poisoning of predatory wildlife. And on Aug. 16 the agency announced that the deterioration of air quality standards would be permitted in some areas.

Unless some controls are quickly put on the country's burgeoning "progress" and development, in the next two years or so much of America's last wildlife and wild areas will be destroyed forever. President Ford's record in Congress—while poor from an environmental standpoint—has been one of strong, old-fashioned patriotism. What could be more patriotic than saving America from the exploiters and destroyers, and preserving a portion of its beauty and natural resources for future generations? A Cabinet dedicated to such a goal would be an important step in this direction.

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