

Wake Up, California!¹

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Thank you very much. It has been a very interesting symposium, and I want to thank Norm Pillsbury and Bill Tietje and Jared Verner; the wonderful students who have done such a good job working with John Bryant and Carolyn Shank—all of the people who have put so much energy into bringing us together to share information about our oak ecosystem.

I would also like to thank members of the California Oak Foundation (COF) who have been working hard since 1988 to raise public awareness about the need to protect and preserve California's oak heritage. And I thank the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program, Rick Standiford, and his able research team; California Department of Fish and Game's Barry Garrison and many of you in this audience such as Professor Tim Plumb, a dedicated professor here at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly); the California Board of Forestry, Director Richard Wilson, and so many others who make a difference.

Many people come together to tackle the enormous challenges of conserving the state's hardwoods which are critical to watershed stability and to wildlife habitat viability.

Though we often work separately on our various responsibilities, we have a collective obligation to protect and pass on this vital ecosystem to those who follow us. And it is toward that common goal that we must rededicate ourselves.

When the California Oak Foundation started, there was not much awareness in a public sense about the loss of oaks throughout the state. Many people appreciated oaks from their childhood landscapes, but there was this sense that the trees were connected more with memories than with the future. At the Oak Foundation offices, we often hear stories of tree houses in oaks, of favorite picnic spots, of magical places and special swimming holes surrounded by oaks. Have you noticed that people tend to take many of the most important things for granted?

The rate at which many of those special oak places were disappearing finally hit many of us. "Here today gone tomorrow" summarizes our state's commitment to this important habitat. We are sleepwalking through the dismantlement of our home, and rarely do we wake up long enough to protest.

Our natural environment is threatened, and our built environments do not produce spaces that support community or family. The old and young suffer, not to mention the middle-aged who are often working and commuting along ribbons of asphalt very long distances from affordable housing to their jobs. The daily grind of maintaining their lives prevents them from living fully, from seeing what is going on around them, from speaking up about the tragedies and losses.

A single oak is lost here, a housing development takes out hundreds there, the builders of freeways, golf courses, and vineyards mow the trees down because they have a different goal in mind. And quite frankly, there is little but public opinion to stop them. It is clearly time to rethink our priorities.

This is where public education comes to play. We all believe in the power of learning and communication, but try to make a dent in informing the hurried, the tired, the ignorant, and the greedy. The reality is that we have 33 million diverse people with just as many opinions and wishes from every corner of the

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world. We are making up a new way of living together each day, and many important matters are slipping through the cracks. People who are charged with leadership in protecting resources often labor under political and economic pressures that impair their potential effectiveness.

The other day I had yet another wake-up call when Richard Wilson, the very Richard Wilson on this stage with me today, and a person for whom I have great personal regard, stood up here and said: "The Board of Forestry and I are against regulating oaks." Well,... before you lose interest at this early hour, I want to get your attention by saying that I do not care whether we use the "R word" or not, but I want to tell you that I think we have to use all of the tools available to us to meet the considerable challenge of protecting these trees and their related habitat. I think that may include tax and/or other financial incentives for mitigating the loss of oaks, and protecting woodlands, most of which are in private ownership. It almost certainly would have to include incentives for responsible land use, and potentially, we should look hard at increased penalties for land and resource abuses. If the public were awakened enough to hold their public agencies and their elected and appointed officials accountable for responsible resource management, it would make quite a difference statewide.

We lost 95 percent of the wetlands in this state by trusting in the good sense of individuals whose primary motivation was to make a buck. We are now in danger of doing the same thing with oak woodlands. It happens gradually. We are like the frogs in the pot of cool water that is heated ever so slowly. We're cooked before we notice the heat. We watch the trees go down; we monitor their absence; we report their steady decline to committees and boards of directors in high places, never being mindful enough to stay STOP! Never being alert enough to think out of the box and come up with bold policies to win the day.

This Symposium has been layered over with this EMERGENCY called the California Aqueduct Project, which began its march from the Central Valley to Santa Barbara some 3 years ago, I believe. All of a sudden people discovered that oaks were going to be among the missing as the pipeline moved on its long-approved route through the Cal Poly campus.

We had a very interesting time yesterday hiking the pipeline route, and looking at maps with your opening speaker of yesterday, Terry Gorton of the State Resources Department. She seems to be a nice person, and she did bother to come here, and she is coming back today to try to find a solution. However, the fact of the matter is that the budgets in the State Resources Department do not include oak protections, and though they have thousands and thousands of people on staff, Fish and Game has a half of a half-time person and a program unfunded. Barry Garrison is terrific. But if Barry Garrison had a staff of 10 or 15 people, and he actually had a budget, think what he could do. If CDF, with their more than 4,000 people, and millions of dollars in budget actually made oak woodlands a modest priority, or even acknowledged their very existence by assigning more than a part-time person to the subject, think what could take place. Think of it: what if there were items in the budget that acknowledged that oaks are just as important as timber or fire suppression. Isn't it about time that we collectively notice what is happening?

So I am not here to insist on locking in on the word "regulation." But I am here to tell you that we had better be addressing this issue with everything we have available: reasonable zoning and land use laws that make us plan and build better communities; that help us stop ugly, inefficient, resource-gobbling strip malls and leapfrog development to meet the needs of the steady outflows of people fleeing from unlivable cities. When people in large quantities move to the country, the country disappears.

Amy Larson, Executive Director of the Oak Foundation, knows that on any day we almost surely will receive calls from around the State saying “help!” We need to stop such and such development. It is often too late to send the public information because these calls come on the day of the development hearing. How does one console a person who is about to lose something very dear to them? When people wake up to their potential loss, the task for individuals concerned about their quality of life is daunting. They are up against well-financed, slick advertising and highly orchestrated strategies. Have you noticed how many oak trees are in those real estate ads? Have you noticed how many streets and developments are named oak this or that? Oakdale, Oakhurst, Oakmont, it goes on and on. Our descendants are going to wonder why we were so crass as to think that you can replace a tree with a word, and have the neighborhood be the same.

The other very alarming thing when a person is trying to be helpful in these situations is the lack of knowledge that people have of the system which governs them. It is difficult to organize anything if you do not know about the decision-making structure. Our schools have failed to teach the basics of being a responsible citizen in a democracy. When you go back to your communities, please work on simple diagrams that describe the decision points and a brief description of things that make a difference: public testimony at hearings; drawings of how the upcoming decision will make the place look 10 years from now; letters to the editor; meetings with elected officials to brief them in a factual way about a community’s concerns. Democracy is time consuming and often messy. It takes rolling up our sleeves and motivating others to do the same if we are going to make a difference.

At COF, we are pretty good at putting together information packets for planning commissions, city councils, and boards of supervisors so that they can hopefully make better, more informed, decisions. It is not easy being an elected or appointed official; it is very important that we help them as much as possible.

We cooperate fully with the press, giving them the very latest information available in a situation so that their readers will know, and hopefully act in their own best interests. Terry Gorton said to me yesterday: “You’ve amped up this pipeline issue ‘till you have all of our attention.” Thank you for noticing! We need the attention of the people in the Resources Department in Sacramento. It is where decisions are being made and—just as often—not made on these important natural resource issues.

It is not enough to say we love oaks. We must do better than that.

So, if it takes getting on the front page; if it takes injunctions and stop-work orders to get people’s attention, so be it. Doesn’t it seem like a waste of energy and an awful lot of drama when good planning and open communication could have produced a better route that would have honored the importance of these trees that have had standing in this community for 300 or 400 years?

There are always going to be temptations to be co-opted in these negotiations. You think, she is a nice woman. She is from the Resources Agency. Let us be reasonable. But, the fact is that this is an untenable situation. While everybody says we need to preserve these resources that are a very important part of our natural inheritance, people are not putting those words into responsible actions.

After a meeting in Sacramento last week where I spoke on the importance of protecting the Central Valley’s agricultural land—a 40-million-acre watershed, not to mention a food-producing mecca like no other in the world—Doug Wheeler, Secretary of Resources, and Carol Whiteside, former mayor of Modesto and now with the Office of the Governor, said once again that there is no political will on behalf of the environment. It barely makes a blip in the polls. “It is not on the political agenda,” says Carol Whiteside. And I respond to

them very directly: "Put it on the agenda." Since you are the politically appointed environmental leaders and you are in these positions of power, then it is your responsibility to make protection of the state's resources rise to the top on the political agenda." Now I realize that I am not being totally fair. They are, after all, nice people with a different perspective. And they are reading different polls because the ones I read say that more than 80 percent of all Americans think of themselves as highly concerned about the environment because people are beginning to connect the dots between a healthy environment and their own health.

Our natural world should not be a partisan issue. Responsible, sustainable use of resources has to be on everyone's agenda: business, labor, childcare specialists, doctors, lawyers, and teachers. Everyone, we must all be conservationists.

Our health is at stake. Our wealth is at stake. Our quality of life is at stake.

Since we are, for all practical purposes, shut out of the political process in Sacramento at this time as far as the environment is concerned, we are looking at trying to build more capacity for good at the grass-roots level. That is what we have been trying to do for some time through the Oak Foundation's outreach programs. We need to enable people out there to stand up for their communities and their children's futures. When COF began, people were coming primarily from a tree-hugger mentality. Everybody wanted to save a single tree. There is still some of that, and the ordinances tend to focus on the large trees, because we have been taught to like big things. We forget about the need for seedlings and saplings in order to have a continuing, healthy forest.

So, we have been working very hard to move people from the single-tree mentality to an oak woodlands awareness. It is really critical for people to understand how it all interconnects. We are talking about an entire ecosystem.

Yesterday, we were up on the hill with the Department of Water Resources representatives; people are focused on saving the oak trees, which is a laudable goal, but there is so much more. With their spreading branches, they make a very nice symbol. However, these generous trees represent more than themselves. I was so proud of Neil Havlik, who is, as of last night, the new president of the California Oak Foundation. He had the audacity to bring into the discussion the importance of the remarkable wildflowers and native grasses on the site.

William Stafford, a poet, said, "Even the ocean believes in the upper end of the river." And he could have gone on: the river believes in the brook, the brook believes in the rivulet, which believes in the rain, and the rain believes in the clouds.

When a bulldozer pushes over a 300-year-old oak, the grass and wildflowers around it do not do well either. The silt fills the creek and kills the fish; the birds, bugs, and other wild things cannot possibly do as well as they did with a standing tree to call home. On and on it goes. We are affected by every action we are taking so we need to be more careful. We need to be more thoughtful. We have good science on why we should conserve our woodlands, but it does not do us any good unless we pay attention to it. It doesn't take us far unless we can educate our elected officials and policy makers to make better decisions. It doesn't end up in better communities unless we change our own behavior and urge others to do the same.

I know that Richard Wilson went out the day before to see the creek and to see how to get across the creek with the minimum impact. He saved his very own home valley from becoming a dam many years ago.

Some of the things we have learned over the last few years is that these resource negotiations are kind of like being right in a fatal car accident. It does not matter how right we are, and we are often right, if we cannot string our arguments and actions together in such a way as to convince others to reevaluate,

to pay closer attention to all of the impacts, to think very carefully about their route to so-called progress. No matter how right we are about these trees representing an entire community of plants and animals, at this moment in this state we are losing ground every day.

There are 110 new towns on the books in California: 110! There were 36 major developments about 24 months ago, and we thought that was astounding. Approximately 7 to 10 million people are expected to move into the oak woodlands in the next couple of decades, and they bring with them their recreation vehicles and their chainsaws, their kids and their cats and dogs. Some people say: "Oh, well, there will not be much impact on the ecosystem." Baloney! We humans change what we come in close contact with, and we do it in a major way. We are so self involved that we tend to not take a look at our own impacts. Developers sometimes ask: "Tell us what we can do so that you will not be on our case if we cut down a tree." I say that the most meaningful thing that they could do would be to move their project to Oakland or some other existing city. Take all these existing buildings with existing infrastructure — sewers, sidewalks, transit, and you could turn the place into a livable city. There are so many vacant buildings. Why don't we put apartments on top floors, offices for businesses on the next level, and retail on the street level. If we operated in this fashion, there would still be oak woodlands to visit in the 21st century and beyond.

What we are looking at, with this pipeline situation, is a good example of what is happening across our state. This pipeline has been on the books for years, and I think Terry Gorton said yesterday, there is enough blame and error to go around. University representatives should have been on the case a long time ago. It is one thing for us to roll into town and crank up the heat to get everybody's attention, but it is quite another thing for people to be vigilant about their part of the world. The pipeline should never have been planned for its present route. It is kind of like the deer in the headlight syndrome. You say to Department of Water Resources' representatives as Neil kept saying yesterday, "Why don't you go down the existing road?" And Norm Pillsbury says: "Stay away from these big trees; go around them. And they respond: "But we already have the pipe and the pipe is straight." So I challenge Cal Poly's Engineering Department to come up with a water pipe that is flexible because imagine how many trees and wildflowers and grasses and streams you could save if you could go around things. Our linear brains, inflexible processes, and the rigid resulting products are killing what we hold most dear.

We must change. We must wake up! The pipe does not have to be straight. Pipe can go around things; the pipe could go under things. It's an amazing thing! We ask: "Could the pipe go over?" And they say, "Oh, over. Uh, you know, the pipe is straight, and it has to go..." So I'm telling you we have a communication problem. When you look at maps that do not show the trees, you are not reading a worthy document.

We need a negotiating class at Cal Poly, and we need a negotiating class in every school and community in this state. We need a negotiation class in every single agency because wherever we go, these challenges require new skills. How do you respond when you have a stop-work order and you find that the tractors started along their path—only across the grassland you understand. This is not called negotiating in good faith.

So we have them in a "dead to rights" situation. Then the University's highest representative at the table says "We have decided to go along with the alignment because it will cost extra money to change the alignment." So, he handed it to them. If you are going to negotiate, you do not give the opposition all of the cookies right off the get-go. They are coming back today, and we are starting from a place of unnecessary vulnerability. We have to do better.

These trees; this ecosystem cannot speak for itself. We were in the car with one of the engineers, and the guy said something, and Neil said, "No, no, I'm representing the trees." And the guy gave him an "Oh my gosh, he's really weird" look. It is understandable from his perspective of not taking the trees into account. He just needs to get the pipe in the ground and covered and move on to the next stretch of the project. He has a budget and a deadline for completion. Meanwhile, we are thinking, the trees cannot talk or walk and they add a lot of value as they stand; the trees need a little help.

Terry Gorton talked a lot about values in her speech yesterday. As we talked, however, the issue of money kept coming up. This is a \$435 million-project, and that is a lot of money. And I do not know how many trees have been mowed down in the pipeline path, but I am sure it is a substantial number. The high cost to the ecosystem is not included in the economic analysis. We have to change our entire way of thinking about these things.

And while we are changing from the outdated Command and Control mode to our present Chaos, which will hopefully lead to a Better Order model, we need to try to listen to each other and agree to struggle with these issues one at a time, all the while attempting to maintain some compassion for one another.

Terry Gorton is not perfect; I, of course, am perfect: two nice ladies. MMMMMmm. Are we going to stay in those roles? It's very unlikely; highly unlikely. I am perfectly prepared to drop my midwestern Methodist upbringing in this case. I definitely believe in good will and improved communications, but stop and think about it. When are we going to take these losses seriously?

These are small negotiations in the total scheme of what we are losing each day. While we have been diverted into defending a handful of trees, no one at this conference has mentioned what we are really talking about: delivering water to a community that needs it because it has grown beyond its carrying capacity. When this water line is completed, what do you think is going to happen in Santa Barbara? The D word: Development. So the people in these communities need all of our help and support to protect what they hold dear. They need as much technical information as they can get. They need a vision and a plan of how they want their communities to look and feel. How big is big enough? How spread out can a community be before it is not one any more? Wouldn't it be better to save the ranches and farms and open spaces and build inward? Couldn't we come up with a way to compensate private landowners who hold about 85 percent of our open lands to keep them that way—on a voluntary buy-in basis of course!

We send local people information every day to try to deal with their city councils and to appeal to their supervisors. When we were going around the state—and I think you know about the seven workshops that we did with the University of California, California Department of Fish and Game, CDF, and others. We were primarily aiming our message at planning departments and decision makers. And what we have found over the past 2 years now that we are through that process is that the planning departments have changed. Many of the people that we educated in that round have moved to different jobs; some who tried to redesign developments with their newfound information are gone, replaced, because the fact of the matter is that land use decisions are politically motivated decisions. A supervisor in El Dorado County has said in public meetings: "You are not going to let facts get in the way of development, are you?" And I say, "Vote Him Out of There." Ignorance should not be tolerated or celebrated with so much at stake.

Where there is land in California, greed is often lurking. People often assert that local supervisors are bought off on development projects, and there is considerable evidence to substantiate that assertion. City council elections are often funded by developers, who if they do not have smooth sailing at the planning commission level, make all-out stands at the council level. Paid

advertising masquerading as folksy newsletters and communities of concern manufactured to counter local opposition.

And so the only thing that stands in the way of really bringing together some kind of comprehensive ecosystem planning and protections for this state's remarkable biodiversity is you-all. You have to be the sparkplugs.

We have to work together better and more effectively to provide these local people with as much information as they need to make persuasive cases for the integrity of their places, of people, and of vital natural systems.

We are starting something new at the California Oak Foundation. We received a grant for a Conservation Circuit Riders program to train non-profit organizations to do more effective media, marketing, and fundraising. We will try to further empower the local people to do their work.

While assisting other non-profit organizations in building capacity to face these issues, we are also attempting to create a Conservation Clearinghouse. All of the technical presentations that have been featured here need to go beyond us to the general public. In my view, we need bulletins, we need press releases, we need to create understandable public information if we are going to save these trees and the ecosystem that they represent.

We need to buddy up with other groups. Some people who like oaks do not like certain groups. They don't like the way people dress; they don't like the color of their hair; they don't like the way they talk. And I say, "Get over it! Just get over it!" There is too much at stake in California to be so provincial; there is too much at stake for all this pettiness. We cannot afford it. There is too much to do.

We have to look at estate tax relief for owners of large pieces of land. I talked to Dick O'Sullivan from the Cattlemen's Association about this yesterday. My oldest son and his family live on a 20,000-acre cattle ranch in Parkfield, and all of my children and grandchildren have a solid connection to the land, for which I'm grateful. Dick and I have many things in common. And still it is going to take work on both of our parts to reach common ground where we can move forward together.

I say: "Dick, we need to tie estate tax relief to conservation easements." He says: "Sure, but what about private property rights." And I say: "Dick, conservationists and cattlemen need to work together in a cooperative fashion." And he says, "Yes, but they can't tell us what to do with our land." Now I know that I need to do better. I say: "My kids are the rodeo champions named Santos. My sons have been known to win the Salinas Rodeo and the Cow Palace, and my daughter has just finished a book on the World Champion Cowboy, Ty Murray." "You're one of the Santos?" he says. It turns out that he went to Davis as a pre-vet student with their father who is a veterinarian. Suddenly I'm not just another Greenie! My family gives me a better place to come from with this man who can play an important role in spreading the word about estate tax relief and other winning strategies for private landowners.

I have worked on efforts which have raised billions of dollars for public land acquisition and parks — Prop 70 and Props 43 and 117, Measure AA and others. I believe that we need parks and public lands in habitat preserves. I salute the Natural Communities Conservation Program efforts that Doug Wheeler, The Endangered Habitat League, The Nature Conservancy, and others are working on. There is a new state park bond in the works as we speak. It may or may not make it to the November ballot, not because there isn't a need, but because of politics. In my view, at this time in this state, the highest priority is to find ways to keep private landowners on their land. We need to use every strategy we can think up because the potential for these privately held lands to turn over in ownership to foreign land speculation companies or developers in the next decade or so is overwhelming. People who own land age just like the rest of us.

Estate taxes, as presently implemented, will force many of these land-holding families to make decisions they do not want to make. Keeping these open and productive lands in the current ownership patterns is much more cost effective than public ownership, given all of the demands for today's dollars.

We need the University of California people and other experts to be funded well in order to have a chance to disseminate research information on more efficient and cost-effective management strategies.

I mean, what I am going to urge Terry Gorton to do after today is to go back to Sacramento and ask, "Where is the oak woodlands budget in CDF?" "Where is it in Fish and Game"? When I mentioned this yesterday, she said, "Oh, I don't get into budgets." Please get into budgets if you want to make a difference to oaks.

If there isn't money for technical assistance and incentives to save oaks; if there isn't money for conservation easements; if there isn't money for producing and disseminating public information to developers, realtors, nursery owners; if agencies don't share their research and other resources and work with the private sector, then we don't really have any chance of saving California's natural oak heritage.

And to the Board of Forestry I say, thank you very much for the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program and the Communications-Outreach Program to counties. It has moved us along. However, in most cases, the adopted documents count on people's good sense, not on their overriding greed for cents. The language in most counties is weak and not up to the challenges we face. People often try to adapt city tree ordinances for rural areas, which does not work well in most cases. We have to put some meat and potatoes on this thing. We need incentives for landowners to keep ownership in their families or with other like-minded folks, and we need incentives for them to manage these open lands for watershed, wildlife, and scenic values.

We need budgets to be reallocated; we need personnel to be reassigned. We need the experts that we have—the Bill Tietjes, the Norm Pillsburys, the Rick Standifords, the Doug McCrearys—all of these people who know so much—we need them to be training a whole cadre of other oak people until we get critical mass.

Otherwise, this is just an intellectual exercise. These oak trees are very beautiful, and that is what a lot of people say to us when they call for help. They are very concerned about a single branch being removed from something they hold dear. We have to take that concern and care, which comes from a very good place, and we have to translate it into being concerned about 17,000 oaks removed in one development's path; a dam being proposed with 4,000 oaks being flooded. It goes on and on. We think that removing five or six oaks up here on the hill is the end of the world. It is not the end of the world. It is just a piece of the pie, and all of the pieces add up.

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to be President of the California Oak Foundation. I have enjoyed it a great deal. I have learned a lot, and had a wonderful time meeting so many good folks around the state. I couldn't have asked for better people to work with over the years. My thanks to each and every one of you who contribute to this worthwhile effort. I do plan for the time being to keep on working with the Oak Foundation on these challenges, and I would urge you to do the same.

Make no mistake, California's oaks are under siege!

It seems to me that there are times when you have to step out of a more structured situation, give up titles and decorum to make the maximum impact. I believe the time for nice, polite discourse has probably just about run out if we are going to make any substantive difference to the state's oak woodlands. I like the vision of myself as the little old lady who speaks the truth and just gets a lot of pleasure out of kicking _ _ _ , as required. Thank you.