

September 14, 1935

[⁵¹⁹~~193~~ Ann. of State Conservation]

FDR Speech File

RE THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS
AT THE NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATION CELEBRATION
LAKE PLACID, NEW YORK
September 14, 1935

MEMO FOR JUDGE ROSENMAN:

This was a good speech in that the President gave some of his ideas on conservation and talked about his past work in the State of New York.

One correction may be desirable where the President pointed out that in a political campaign 'two years ago' he had brought up the subject of conservation. This, I believe, should be corrected to read 'three years ago.' I think the President referred to reforestation in his Atlanta speech in 1932.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE
FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF STATE CONSERVATION
LAKE PLACID, NEW YORK
September 14, 1935, 9.45 A.M.

(There was a pageant, which included a demonstration of woodcraft and fire control, also the releasing of several thousand birds. Governor Lehman introduced the President.)

Governor Lehman, Commissioner Osborne, my friends:

Today brings back many memories. The last time I was in this spot, speaking in fact from this same platform, I am told, was three years ago at the time of the Olympic ice sports. We had as our guests in the State a great many men and women from Europe, most of the countries of Europe, and Japan. I am very glad that this beautiful Stadium has proven its usefulness on a good many other occasions.

My memory goes back a good deal further than three years ago, in fact it goes back to twenty-five years ago, when a very young and unexpectedly elected Senator from the Hudson River Valley, because they couldn't think of anything else for him to do in the Senate, made him a Chairman of what was known as the Forest, Fish and Game

Committee. It was a post that was supposed to be a sinecure, one of no importance, because in those days there was no such thing as the Conservation Department. The Forest, Fish and Game Commission of the State, headed up by an old friend of mine, the father of Commissioner Osborne, started in during the following two years on what was the germ of this great development. We had been protecting what game we had left, we had been planting a few fish in the streams and, with an entirely inadequate force, we were trying, almost in vain, to prevent fires in the Adirondacks. As a matter of fact, the Adirondacks Preserve and the Catskill Preserve in those days were only half the size that they are today. We were growing in the nurseries of the State a few hundred thousand trees, very few people were using them and there was practically no interest in what you and I know today as conservation in its broadest sense.

But, beginning under the leadership in those days of Commissioner Osborne -- Lithgow's father -- people began to take an interest. There was a very fine episode that occurred in that session of the Legislature. I was very keen, after having studied the subject, to get the people of the State interested in preventing soil erosion in the

Adirondacks. There were great areas which had been cut over, the tops of the trees remaining far above the ground. I wanted to get through what was known as the Top Lopping Law and I wanted to get people interested in seeing to it that the trees were preserved on the tops of our mountains. So I invited the Chief Forester of the United States, a man by the name of Gifford Pinchot, who was one of the pioneers of forestry, who had studied in Europe, to come up to Albany. We had a session in the Assembly Chamber and to it I succeeded in getting a large number of Senators and Assemblymen.

Gifford Pinchot put two pictures on a screen and those two pictures did more than any other thing to sell conservation to the Legislature of the State of New York. One of them, the first one he showed, was a photograph of an old Chinese painting, the painting of some place up in North China having been executed in approximately the year 1510, four hundred years before this talk that he was giving. It showed a beautiful valley, and a walled town in the valley. It was a town which, history says, had three hundred thousand people in it. There was a beautiful stream running through that valley with fields and crops

on both sides of it. It was obviously a stream that was not subject to flood conditions. The mountains on each side of the valley were covered with spruce pine forests, clear to their tops. But, if you examined this old painting, you would see that up on the side of one of those mountains was a streak, and if you examined it closely, you found that it was a logging chute. In other words, those old Chinamen, four hundred years before, had begun to cut the timber off the top of the mountain and they were chuting it down to the valley for all kinds of purposes. They had never heard of conservation and history shows that for the next one hundred years the people in that valley cut off all the trees from the top of the mountain.

Then came the second picture, one that Gifford Pinchot, I think, had taken himself, had taken from the identical spot where the first painting had been made. That second picture showed a desert. It showed mountains that had rocks on them and nothing else. There was no grass, no trees, just rocks. In other words, the entire soil had been washed off those mountains and there they were, bare for all time. Down in the valley, the old, walled town was in ruins. I think there were three hundred

people left in the ruins, trying to eke out a meagre existence. The stream had become a flood stream. Rocks and boulders had covered the fertile fields that once existed on both sides of the stream.

There you saw the wreck of a great civilization of four hundred years ago and nothing left except some ruins and rocks.

Well, that picture in those days, twenty-five years ago, sold conservation and forestry to the Legislature of the State of New York. And, as a result, we were enabled to get through the first important legislation for conservation. From that time on, you and I know the history. You know that a few years ago we started a more ambitious program in the State, not only for fish and game, but also for the continued purchase by the State of submarginal land and worked out a program for the better use of land as a whole.

It is fine to see this splendid and efficient force under the State Conservation Department. Each year that goes by, they are becoming more efficient, and this is one of the activities of the State that I am very certain will keep going through all the years.

I am glad also to see these boys from the CCC Camps. It is just two years ago when a certain person, who was entering a political campaign, suggested that for the preservation of the forests of the Nation, for the planting of acres. that needed planting, for the purposes of preventing soil erosion and, incidentally, for the purpose of helping a great many unemployed families, that the Government of the United States ought to take several hundred thousand young men and ask them to go into forests all over the United States, to preserve those forests and to increase them. And I remember the comment that greeted that suggestion. Some of you who are here remember the ribald laughter about planting trees, this "crazy dream", this "political gesture".

Well, there are five hundred and ten thousand young men today in CCC Camps in every State of the Union. They are preserving the forests and the soil of the United States for generations to come. The idle dream has become a fact. And I see no reason why I should not take this occasion to tell you that, in my judgment, these Camps that do so much good in every State of the Union are not only good for future generations but are doing a lot of

good for this generation. I see no reason why I should not tell you that these Camps, in my judgment, are going to be a permanent part of the policy of the United States Government. (Applause)

Of course, I do not know if, when Congress meets again, we shall be able to continue them on the present very large scale. Over one million boys, during the past two years, have passed through or are now in those Camps. We have over five hundred thousand now but, if things go along as they are today with a general pick-up in employment, it is my thought that in the future years, the people of this country might well afford to have, every year, three hundred thousand young men go through these Camps. We have, very literally, only just scratched the surface. We have a long ways to go. There is enough work in sight right in this State -- I think Commissioner Osborne will bear me out -- to continue the work of the CCC Camps for a whole generation to come.

There is one more point that I would like to make to you who are regularly in the service of the State. You are accomplishing the forestry-game end of it. You are accomplishing an exceedingly useful purpose. There

has been great progress on State lands but, at the same time, one of our problems is to extend the knowledge and practice of forestry to private lands as well. This State is not nearly as badly off today as a great many other States, but, of course, lumber, timber, is a commercial asset to the Nation. And so, outside of these permanent Government preserves, where we are not going in for commercial timber, outside of those areas, there are millions of acres that are being used for commercial forestry. The professional foresters, of which I almost consider myself one because they made me an honorary member -- the professional foresters of the country sometimes use long words: They are all working today for what they call "sustained yield". Well, the average citizen does not understand what "sustained yield" means. So, for those average citizens I will translate it in this way: What we are seeking in all the privately owned forest lands, from the farm woodlot up to the large lumbering operations, what we are seeking is the treatment of trees as a crop. Now, that does not mean merely a crop, but an annual crop.

In other words, we must start at the bottom and persuade the farmer that he must only take off his woodlot

each year the amount of trees -- lumber, logs, cordwood, whatever it may be -- equivalent to the growth made in that woodlot that year. And so with the larger lumbering operations. There are more and more lumber companies with very large acreage who are coming to this annual crop theory. With that, we shall eliminate some of the terrific evils of the past. Not in this State, but in many States you will find abandoned communities, communities that sometimes ran as high as three thousand or five thousand people, that were put in there for a lumbering operation. The timber was cut clean over a period of five or ten years and then that community was abandoned to its fate. If you put this thing on an annual basis, your communities in the forest areas will last for all time.

Then there is one other phase of it that is worth thinking about. If timber is treated as an annual crop, it becomes an asset on which you can raise money and I hope that the next session of the Congress will pass legislation which will extend credit to the owners of forest land, credit based on the asset of the crop. There is no reason why either Government or private banking industry should not consider trees just as much of an asset, if they are

properly taken care of, as houses or barns or anything else on which, today, we extend credit.

These are some of the things that Conservation has got to look forward to, and in the meantime the spreading of the gospel, the spreading of the gospel of conservation, is something that we are succeeding in accomplishing. The people in the last two years have become more and more conscious of the practical economic effect of what we are doing. They are becoming more and more conscious of the value to themselves, city dwellers and country dwellers, in protecting these great assets of nature that God has given us.

And so, my friends, as a very old Conservationist, I am glad to be with you here today and to congratulate you on the fine work that you are doing. May it go on through all the years. (Applause)