

# REMARKS OF THE SECRETARY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

AT ENVIRONMENTAL VIRGINIA '98  
APRIL 2, 1998

John Paul Woodley, Jr.\*

As Attorney General, as a candidate for Governor, and now as Governor, Jim Gilmore has communicated a clear and consistent message on environmental stewardship.

I am delighted to be here at this important annual conference to bring you greetings from Governor Gilmore. I thank our gracious hosts at the Virginia Military Institute, General Bunting and Captain Erchul. Presentation of this Conference is by no means the least of VMI's many contributions to the welfare of our Commonwealth.

I am especially delighted to see here today so many friends in government and in the private sector who I have worked with on so many vital environmental issues as Deputy Attorney General.

As Attorney General, Jim Gilmore delivered on his commitment to foster a strong and healthy environment through responsible stewardship of our natural resources. Today, I reaffirm Governor Gilmore's commitment.

I want to focus our particular attention on the Governor's number one environmental priority - improving the quality of our Commonwealth's great waters.

I first came to Virginia 28 years ago to study not far from this spot at Washington & Lee University. Since that time, Virginia, with all her natural, scenic and historical resources has been my home.

Being here in Lexington, reminds me of the days I spent at Washington & Lee. In those days there was a tradition, which I hope and trust is still honored, that students would spend many hours in the Spring weather floating on the beautiful Maury River in Goshen Pass.

---

\* Secretary of Natural Resources.

We called the practice "tubing," since generally the most sophisticated raft any of us could afford was an old discarded truck inner tube.

I can trace to those early days as a student in Lexington my deep and abiding love for Virginia's waters. So I am delighted to return to Lexington to talk to you today about water quality in the Commonwealth.

Across our State, Virginia communities are concerned about threats to their water.

This week we learned that bait fish in the Chesapeake Bay may be suffering due to a decline in the microscopic animals they feed upon.

Some of our best trout streams show the harmful effects of acid rain.

The James River is regularly assaulted by pollution from sewer overflows at Lynchburg and Richmond.

Too many of our streams and lakes show bacteria and nutrient enrichment from runoff from farms and urban and suburban development.

Especially disturbing is the loss of wetlands, which serve as essential filters to keep harmful runoff from lakes and streams.

The time has come for a concerted effort by all Virginians to avert these and other perils.

Now, I am not an apostle of gloom and doom. Nor do I have a reputation as an alarmist.

Thanks to the hard work and cooperation of people from every area of the Commonwealth, including many of the people present in this hall, Virginia has made impressive strides in protecting and enhancing our water resources.

That cooperation, and the clear and consistent leadership of Governor Gilmore, made this past session of the General Assembly one of the most productive ever for water quality.

I'd like to review with you a few of the achievements of the Gilmore administration during the General Assembly session.

Beginning with his first State of the Commonwealth address, Governor Gilmore clearly communicated that water quality improvement was the number one environmental priority for his administration.

Our General Assembly has provided the leadership and vision to help us chart our course. This past session, in spite of the enormous budgetary pressures of many important and conflicting priorities, the General Assembly appropriated \$57.7 million to improve water quality in the Commonwealth.

Let me put this figure in perspective. The total annual budget for all agencies in the Secretariat of Natural Resources, for all purposes, is just over \$200 million. This \$57.7 million is over and above that figure, and represents an historic commitment to our crusade for water quality.

We do not take this commitment lightly. No part of the Commonwealth will be overlooked, and no lake or stream or estuary is so small that it will escape our attention and concern.

Nearly \$54 million of that investment will go directly to the Water Quality Improvement Fund, providing direct grants to prevent both point and non-point source water pollution. The other \$3.8 million will go directly to soil and water conservation efforts throughout the Commonwealth.

This investment will improve water quality across Virginia and help us reach our goal of reducing nutrient loads entering the Chesapeake Bay by 40% from 1985 levels by the year 2000. By supporting municipal wastewater treatment plant upgrades, urban stormwater runoff control, and agricultural best management practices, we will reach this goal while supporting statewide efforts of water quality improvement.

Never before has so much state funding been allocated to improving Virginia's water quality. The challenge of the next two years will be to spend these funds wisely and fulfill the great expectations the Governor and I share with the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Protecting and enhancing water quality has been an issue Virginians have grappled with since colonial times.

Last month, I visited Mount Vernon and had the chance to talk to one of the historians who is involved in a very interesting project there that showcases George Washington, the Farmer.

Few people realize that George Washington, in addition to being a great Virginian and the father of our country, was one of the most advanced and scientific farmers of his day.

Mount Vernon has actually re-created one of Washington's farms, using the crops and livestock that Washington is known to have employed.

I was amazed to learn that George Washington used riparian buffers on his Mount Vernon estate. Washington drew detailed maps for the use of his farm managers, and along every stream that crossed his fields he set aside a strip of land labeled simply, "MEADOW."

George Washington recognized the value of riparian buffers. Were he still farming today, he could take advantage of legislation proposed by Governor Gilmore and adopted UNANIMOUSLY by the General Assembly that allows localities to reduce or eliminate real property taxes on land set aside as a wetland or riparian buffer.

The Governor also wanted to encourage landowners to make environmentally beneficial improvements to their lands. Under current law, these improvements can result in increased local real property tax assessments.

Thus, the Governor proposed and the General Assembly UNANIMOUSLY approved legislation that will allow localities to avoid this disincentive by wholly or partially exempting the additional property value from real estate taxation.

These two pieces of legislation give localities the power to remove disincentives for landowners who seek to be environmentally conscious. It encourages all Virginians to become responsible stewards of our natural resources.

Clearly, this session of the General Assembly was very productive on the environmental front.

Virginia made great progress in the area of water quality. With the investment contained in the biennial budget, and the tax incentives for riparian buffers and other environmental improvements, we have much to celebrate. But, we have much left to accomplish

As I said, I am not an apostle of gloom and doom. But I think I know where my duty lies, and it is a duty that is incumbent on all who love Virginia's waters.

Winston Churchill once said, "It is not given to the cleverest and the most calculating of mortals to know, with certainty, what is their interest."

"And yet it is given to quite a lot of simple folk to know, every day, what is their duty."

The Governor and I recognize that our duty is to embark upon this long term project. It is our duty to put the wheels in motion, to use the new tools at our disposal, and to recruit and solicit the help of all of you in our efforts to improve Virginia's water quality.

I am here today to ask each of you, and everyone who treasures the marvelous waters of Virginia, to join with us in this great undertaking.

It may be that you and I will see only the first fruits of this struggle. Our waters, like many of the great gifts of Providence, are wonderfully resilient, and will, given time and care, heal themselves and purge themselves of the pollutants that imperil them.

But this work will take time, effort and patience. It is not the work of one Governor, of one Secretary, of one agency of government or indeed of State Government alone. We must all commit ourselves to this undertaking and to the cooperation that will help us achieve this awesome goal.

Let me tell you about a few of the projects that are underway.

Preventing pollution at its source is the best way to improve water quality. The Department of Environmental Quality is dedicated to reducing point source pollution throughout the Commonwealth. This year's biennial budget dedicated \$37.1 million to point source assistance. With that investment, DEQ will continue to provide grants, loans, and technical expertise to localities and private industry to upgrade their facilities, reducing point source pollution.

For example, this month DEQ will loan \$909,000 to Loudoun County to assist individual homeowners in making improvements to their inadequate on-site wastewater systems. Another example is a \$6.5 million loan to the Town of Hillsville to construct a new sewage treatment plant.

Since 1986, funds through Virginia's loan program have eliminated 12 primary dischargers, upgraded or replaced 22 inadequate lagoons, upgraded 70 outdated treatment facilities, and provided design grants for the elimination of 2 remaining municipal primary wastewater treatment facilities in addition to numerous other smaller projects.

Working with citizens and local government, loans such as these emphasize our commitment to improving Virginia's waterways in all parts

of the Commonwealth, from the vast suburbs of Northern Virginia to the mountains of the Southwest.

Addressing point source pollution is an expensive and highly technical process. However, individual citizens are taking the responsibility to address non-point source pollution in their own backyards.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation is the primary agency helping combat non-point source pollution. Since 1997, DCR has invested \$5 million in non-point source projects. Half of that money has been invested directly in developing and implementing best management practices on farms throughout the Commonwealth.

Farmers rely on a healthy environment for their livelihood. Since the days of George Washington, Virginia's farmers have striven to be dedicated stewards of our environmental resources. Thanks to the cooperation of the Virginia Farm Bureau, the Virginia Agribusiness Council, and Virginia's farmers, best management plans are in effect throughout the Commonwealth and are protecting Virginia's waterways from nutrient enrichment. We must continue to support this effort and expand it to include every farm in Virginia.

The other half of that \$5 million, has been invested in other non-point source control projects such as the installation of riparian buffers, the retrofitting of stormwater management ponds, and the modification of livestock feed to reduce the nutrient content of the waste.

The efforts of Virginians around the Commonwealth are paying off. Whether it be recycling used motor oil, using lawn fertilizer in a responsible way, or monitoring water quality in local lakes and streams, individual efforts are helping improve our water quality. But there is much more we can do.

Let me give you some examples of the efforts of different communities in Virginia.

In Fauquier County, Biology students at Liberty High School have undertaken the task of testing the water quality of Marsh Run, identified by DEQ as stream requiring priority attention. These students are collecting and testing samples and sharing their data with DEQ and the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District. The study figures help these groups locate and alleviate the non-point pollution sources and contribute to the overall Tributary Strategy goal of reducing nutrients in the Chesapeake Bay.

At the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station there are a number of environmental programs underway thanks to a DEQ grant and the cooperation of volunteers from the local community and the federal government. This week, volunteers are undertaking efforts to establish a 1.2 mile, 100 foot wide riparian buffer. This buffer will restore wildlife habitat and help control soil erosion in an area where all wooded vegetation had been removed in the interest of security.

In areas throughout the Commonwealth, volunteer efforts such as those by the Rappahannock River Restoration Project are underway to develop buffers along streams, rivers and wetlands to protect and enhance water quality.

These all sound like small undertakings, but taken as a whole are making major improvements in our water quality. The commitment of the Governor and the General Assembly to this crusade will breath new life and support into these and other projects.

Like all great undertakings, our struggle for water quality will have its controversies, its setbacks, its dark moments of trial, and its hours of triumph. It will also, you may be sure, have its heroes and heroines. To recognize these heroes and heroines, and give them the encouragement and praise they will deserve, I am announcing today a special awards program designed to honor those who join with us in the fight for water quality in their communities.

Over the next few weeks, my office will develop this program and give proper recognition to the numerous individuals engaged in this challenge.

As we move forward on our crusade, we do not undertake this fight alone. Our friends and allies in the federal government share our concern, and will share our burden.

Much has been made of past differences between federal authorities and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Throughout all these differences, significant as they have been, we have continued to work closely with all those agencies of the United States whose mission and purpose it is to protect and preserve our environment.

It would be naive and foolish to suppose that we will not have differences of opinion with one or another federal agency in the future. But a true and accurate record of our relation would place heavy emphasis on the myriad of ways in which we work together in a common cause.

Governor Gilmore's environmental policies represent a view that respects our environment while ensuring a positive economic climate. Our view is that economic prosperity and a healthy environment are mutually dependent. Virginians do not want economic prosperity at the cost of a degraded environment, and they do not expect to sacrifice economic prosperity in order to preserve the environment.

In order to achieve our goals of improved water quality, a healthy environment, and a strong economy, we must rely on the positive cooperation of citizens, the private sector and all levels of government - local, state and federal. I am confident that this cooperation will allow us to fulfill these high expectations.

Not far from here is the tomb of Virginia's most distinguished soldier, Robert E. Lee. Here in Lexington he is remembered as a man of peace, an educator and a healer of his nation, as President of Washington College, now Washington & Lee University.

During his lifetime, Lee expressed the view that duty was the most sublime word in the English language.

The Governor and I understand what our duty is with regards to the environment. Article XI of the Constitution of Virginia makes it the policy of the Commonwealth to protect its atmosphere, lands and waters from pollution, impairment or destruction for the benefit, enjoyment and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth.

I regard that provision of the Constitution as my job description. I think it is clear that it instructs us in our duty to protect and preserve the waterways of Virginia.

I ask for your support and cooperation in this important endeavor and others as we strive to maintain and enhance Virginia's incomparable natural, scenic and historical resources, not just for the generations we represent today, but for generations of Virginians yet to come.

