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GENERAL RELEASE NO. 26

REMARKS BY
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AT THE
UNVEILING OF THE DESIGN OF THE JOHN MUIR COMMEMORATIVE STAMP
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING - MAIN LOBBY
MADISON, WISCONSIN
FEBRUARY 8, 1964 - 2 P. M.

It is good to be back in my native state and on the campus of my University--
a scene of so many warm, personal memories.

We are here today to honor the memory of John Muir, Class of 1863. We are here to dedicate to his name a plot of unspoiled woodland, above Lake Mendota, and to preserve his memory throughout the Nation by issuing, in April, a John Muir commemorative postage stamp.

The honors we pay him are small ones for a man of such unique and peculiar genius. For he was our outstanding naturalist and conservationist, a man who captured the rugged beauty of nature in his writings. He was also a man of action who learned to fight when the things he loved were threatened with destruction. And, during the closing years of the 19th century, our natural resources were being dispoiled by a giant "giveaway" to the lumber industry. While the rest of the nation ignored what was happening under their very noses, whole mountains were being turned into wasteland. So John Muir became an eloquent lobbyist for nature and he finally awakened the country to the urgency of the situation.

John Muir was born in Scotland in 1838 and came to America when he was eleven to live with his family in the wilderness, near Portage, Wisconsin. He was an ingenious and creative boy, with a flair for invention. When he

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wanted a violin, he made one with his own hands. He built clocks, whittling the cogwheels from wood. Later he modified a homemade clock into what was certainly one of the most effective alarm clocks ever produced. Muir called it his "early rising machine." He connected the clock mechanically to his bed so that when the alarm went off, the bed tilted, causing the sleeper to be dumped onto the floor.

With a ten dollar gold piece in his pocket, Muir left home at the age of 21 to work his way through the University of Wisconsin. He lived in North Hall on fifty cents a week, cooking his meals on the wood furnace there. Usually he ate baked potatoes or graham mush, sometimes with bread and molasses.

It is said that Muir's interest in botany began when he examined a blossom that had fallen from a great locust tree that stood beside North Hall. Up to that time, he had planned to become a doctor. Today, the trees and the wildlife in John Muir Park are much as they were a century ago when Muir strolled through this pleasant glade and fell in love with nature.

Years later, in his autobiography, John Muir recalled his final day at the University. He wrote:

"From the top of a hill on the north side of Lake Mendota, I gained a last wistful lingering view of the beautiful University grounds and buildings, where I spent so many hungry and happy and hopeful days. There with streaming eyes I bade my blessed Alma Mater farewell. But I was only leaving one University for another, the Wisconsin University for the University of the Wilderness."

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The John Muir commemorative postage stamp we are unveiling today

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shows the great naturalist attending his University of the Wilderness -- in a classroom of giant sequoia trees in California, which he helped to save from destruction. The stamp was designed by Rudolph Wendelin, an artist of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, and an ardent conservationist himself. Mr. Wendelin's first job was in the Milwaukee office of the Forest Service thirty years ago, and he attended Layton Art School in that city. We think that he has done a first-rate job in capturing the spirit of John Muir on a postage stamp.

The stamp will be issued with first day ceremonies on April 29 in Martinez, California, where the great naturalist spent the final years of his life and where he died in 1914.

When we look back into history to give credit to the leaders of the conservation movement we find men who were dreamers and men who put these dreams into action. The dreamers included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John James Audubon -- all of whom were appalled at the way we were wasting our natural riches.

The men of action included John Muir, Gifford Pinchot and Carl Schurz, the founder of the Liberal Party and a one-time resident of Madison. As a crusading U. S. Senator, Schurz called for land reform, and as Secretary of the Interior in 1877 he proposed establishment of a series of Federal forest reservations. His opponents defeated him. They called his plan "un-American!"

Pinchot and Muir were more successful. Their writings attracted a great deal of public attention and their cause had another strong champion in Teddy Roosevelt. During the Roosevelt Administration, in fact, some 100 million acres of forest land were set aside for future public use.

Thirty years later, conservation found another champion in Franklin Roosevelt, who once described himself as "a tree grower." The Civilian Conservation Corps, of which he was so proud, planted two billion trees, aided wildlife restoration and built needed facilities in the National Parks.

Franklin Roosevelt's additional conservation reforms included creation of the

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Soil Conservation Service, the Agriculture Adjustment Administration and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Today we are a far richer, more beautiful nation because of the foresight and relentless efforts of these men.

But conservation cannot be a static thing. As we grow in population the problems of conservation multiply. John F. Kennedy expressed the problem this way:

"The crisis may be quiet, but it is urgent. We must do in our day what Theodore Roosevelt did sixty years ago and Franklin Roosevelt thirty years ago: we must expand the concept of conservation to meet the imperious problems of the new age. We must develop new instruments of foresight and protection and nurture in order to recover the relationship between man and nature and to make sure that the national estate we pass on to our multiplying descendants is green and flourishing."

I hope that in its way, the John Muir commemorative postage stamp will remind Americans of this "quiet crisis"; that it will enlist their support of programs now underway; that it will remind them of the important task that lies ahead.

Our own state's \$50 million, ten-year plan for conservation, I am proud to say, is the most forward looking in the country. Gaylord Nelson got it started when he was Governor and John Reynolds is keeping it going. Already it has resulted in the purchase of 963 separate parcels of land, totalling 80,522 acres, at a cost of nearly \$7½ million. This land will be devoted to sport and recreation for all of the people for all time.

Because of this far-sighted conservation bill, passed by the Legislature in 1961, the Wisconsin of tomorrow will increase in natural beauty, and more and more people will share in it. This is a highly gratifying example of bipartisan political cooperation for the public good.

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And, on the national level, I can report to you that President Johnson is very much aware of the urgent need for new conservation programs and has already proposed several major bills to Congress.

Now pending in Congress are the Wilderness Bill, the Land and Water Conservation Fund Bill, and the bill to establish a Youth Conservation Corps.

The Wilderness Bill would establish a National Wilderness Preservation System made up of parks, wildlife refuges, game ranges and forests -- preserving for all time areas that would remain wild and primitive and untouched by civilization.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Bill would be financed on a pay-as-you-go basis. The people who use recreation areas would be asked to pay a small fee for this enjoyment.

And finally, the all-important Youth Conservation Corps Bill places young men under the supervision of experienced Federal and State Conservation agencies. Their mission would be to provide the American people with more enjoyable park and recreation lands, more productive forests, more fish and game, cleaner streams, and better protected watersheds.

It should be encouraging to you to know that President Johnson is carrying on this conservation battle in the tradition of the two Roosevelts and John F. Kennedy.

We need and deserve this conservation legislation. I hope we get it. And certainly passage of these three bills would gladden the heart of John Muir.