

Over-Zealous Engineering

An Address by W. L. Finley Before the 20th Annual Meeting of the Izaak Walton League of America, LaSalle Hotel, Chicago, March 27, 1942

PRESIDENT GREGORY: It is my privilege to present to you now, the accomplished ornithologist, peerless photographer of big game, and acknowledged leader in continuing loyal efforts in behalf of conservation, who will speak to us on **OVER-ZEALOUS ENGINEERING**, Bill Finley of Portland, Oregon. (Applause)

MR. W. L. FINLEY (Vice-President, I. W. L. A.): Mr. Chairman, Friends: I suppose in my speaking, I can never help but talk about the fun we have had, Mrs. Finley and I, for many, many years, photographing birds, and I don't know whether I should tell you about an incident or not, except that now during the time when we are in war, you know there may be a real danger in even shooting with a camera.

One month ago today during the afternoon of February 27, Mrs. Finley and I were on the beach southwest of Los Angeles. Mrs. Finley was sitting in the car watching through a field-glass the different kinds of wading birds that had come South for the winter, while I was sneaking closer and closer and got some good kodachromes at a distance of fifteen or twenty feet.

A few minutes later, I was captured by two soldiers armed with rifles. I was taken to the guard station where they phoned for a Captain. After being questioned, I was taken to the local police station, and then to the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the U. S. Department of Justice in Los Angeles. Here one of the attorneys wrote the record of my entire life history from the time of birth to what I had been doing up to the present, also the data regarding my wife, two children, where they live and what they are doing. I, of course, announced that I was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Izaak Walton League of America. As I like to shoot birds with a camera, I asked where I could photograph.

A few days later, this special agent in charge of this government service wrote me:

"... Concerning the recent questioning brought about by taking photographs on the beach near El Segundo, California, I regret that I cannot advise you as to the locations in which it will be possible for you to make your photographs as all restricted defense zones wherein photography is not permitted are under the control of the United States Army and change from time to time. It is my suggestion that before photographing any certain point, you make

local inquiries of authorities as to whether the particular section you desire to photograph is within a restricted zone. I know that you realize that the instance in which you were questioned only shows the alertness of our defenses on the Coast, and I appreciate your cooperation with this office at that time."

I was interested from the time I was held up. I didn't lose any cameras or pictures, even though in my old togs I must have looked like a Jap. The reason I respected the soldiers guarding the beach was that they are striving to protect the people of this nation and defend their country.

In studying the defense situation on the Pacific Coast, one cannot help but think of the great numbers of young soldiers on small salaries, going into great danger to protect this country and the people that live in it. In comparison to this, out of a hundred million other people of this nation, how many of these are striving solely to make money for themselves without regard to the general good of others?

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Inasmuch as we are interested in woods, waters, and wild-life of this nation, it seems that comparatively few people give the needed time and work for the conservation of these resources as a basic principle of our future. In the first place, people who exploit natural resources for private gain are often careless as to their destruction. In the second place, where one natural resource may be the greatest need of our nation because it has many different uses, many people who gain through one use may be destroying other uses.

Let us consider what is best for the future of this nation. The need of existence and the basis of wealth are land and water. The conservation of these resources is necessary. Let us compare the present handling of land and water. The facts show that federal officials are *managing government land in a satisfactory manner, but they are not conserving our water resources in the same way*, even though water is the life and builder of land.

It is well known that the Department of Agriculture has made a long and careful study to conserve and improve land. Every effort has been made to prevent soil erosion. The government foresters have handled the vast timbered areas well, because the forests mother the water supply and prevent soil erosion. Public lands such as national parks and monuments are properly maintained for the education and recreation of the masses.

Next comes the question of how our water resources are handled by different government bureaus, especially by engineers. The different uses of water resources are under separate bureaus, and *there is no well balanced water program for the whole country*. This brings us to the basic principle that I want to discuss.

A few years ago this nation went on a spending spree and nearly every section of the country wanted federal funds for local projects, which mostly benefitted private interests. As a resident of Oregon, I have often mentioned that the proposed Willamette Valley Project passed by congress was

a typical example. Certain business men were perfectly frank and told me that this government should balance its budget, but since it wouldn't we should grab all we could for our community. This forced the nation to spend money on a political and not a business basis. Anyone knows that if the United States had spent that vast sum of money to gradually build up the defenses of our country, we should not have been totally unprepared when this war came. But who knew this? Today this nation has to go in debt more and more. The money should be spent from a business, not a political standpoint. Our representatives in congress are still bombarded by politicians, and the taxpayers' money is still being wasted on local projects for the private gain of selfish individuals.

We know that pure water is the greatest need of the human race and necessary to maintain all forms of life. The recreational use of water is for health and happiness. Water also fosters all forms of fish life for food. Another most important use of water is to moisten the soil to nourish all growing crops. Rivers are a source of power production and transportation. Other allied matters are flood control, the prevention of poisoning rivers by pollution which is a menace to public health, destroys recreation, and kills off our fish supplies.

Next comes the important question as to whether we are conserving water for its most valuable purposes. If it is the responsibility of government bureaus to maintain the national uses of water and to have the spending of federal funds, are they spending them for the best interests of the people, or more for local interests and private gain?

What does the government produce? What money of its own does it have? None. It gets its money from the people to spend for their welfare. Since it has been taking money from the people, can anyone mention any amount it has spent for the important domestic use of water, for the recreational use of rivers, for the cleaning up of streams for public health, and the saving of fish resources? Congress hasn't even passed a law to that effect.

The great problem that has been advanced by engineers is for the government to pay for the damming of rivers of this country. Inasmuch as this is an important issue from certain angles, why should this not have a careful study not only by engineers, but also by economists and scientists?

Let us consider the uses of water, to what extent federal funds are spent, whether one use of water destroys other uses, and whether the projects completed are for the benefit of all the people or just for private benefits in certain localities. Take as an example money spent for flood control of rivers. *It was a common practice of many people to homestead river lands which were not the right places to live because of floods.* Some engineers recommended that these settlers should be moved, others advised the building of dams for private profits and for a group of local farmers.

In regard to waterway transportation, since the coastlines, harbors, and bays are under government control and are the most important defenses for public protection, no one can question the spending of federal funds to keep them

in perfect condition. If I had time to discuss inland waterway transportation, I could show that this is fifty years out of date, because this whole nation is a network of steel rails and every populated district is lined with modern highways where trucks supply numerous traffic demands. There is no chance for a monopoly, and inland waterway transportation is not cheaper than by land. The facts show that this is one of the most expensive games that profiteers play. The report of the National Resources Board of June 30, 1937, showed that \$2,186,000,000 had been taken from the taxpayers' pockets and was really spent for the benefit of local communities and private interests. One ought to compare this to a water project like the Panama Canal.

Damming for Power

There is a large proportion of engineers and other government officials who want our rivers dammed for the development of power. It has often been stated that the first and best source of power is coal. Since more power is needed and since we have a vast supply of coal which is a cheaper way of producing power, has there been even a suggestion of utilizing this method? Is water power a business, or a political issue? Since many citizens want cheaper power and want the government to take the place of private industry, is it business or politics? In the electric industry, can federal officials make ends meet, which is the first requisite of business? In any well known project like the Bonneville Dam, will the complete expenditures and returns be printed and furnished to the public? This project was begun with a PWA grant of \$20,000,000 to the Army Engineers September 29, 1933. The total estimated cost was to be \$31,000,000. For this project, the government has spent over \$100,000,000. Will these expenditures and income be given to the people?

In traveling through many western states, anyone can be amazed at the wonderful farming districts, how the use of water for irrigating arid lands has produced tremendous crops. It looks like a most successful result of dams on our rivers. Here again, however, we should consider the facts. For this reason, we have to look up the history of the United States Bureau of Reclamation.

Questionable Reclamation

It is well known that the Reclamation Act passed by congress in 1902 was intended to *irrigate arid lands owned by the government to be sold to needy farmers*. It happened at that time that many people possessed wide stretches of worthless lands in the West. They soon got busy and used political pressure to get their lands irrigated by the government. Congressmen and senators fell into line and so did Reclamation officials and engineers. Since every single acre in many of the projects put through was privately owned, all these land owners had to do was to capitalize government expenditures to sell their lands at fancy prices. The immediate benefits of reclamation were soon evident to real estate profiteers and to speculative land owners. Land worth \$3

an acre was sold to farmers for from \$50 to \$80 an acre. The federal cost of irrigating this land ranged anywhere from \$100 to \$300 per acre. The farmers soon learned that to pay interest and principal on these lands broke them completely.

After the real estate boomers and land owners grew fat at the expense of the taxpayer, the only method of keeping farmers on this land was for congress to relieve them of paying both interest and principal. If anyone wishes to discuss this with the thousands of farmers on these federal irrigated lands, they will tell you what they think of this as a business proposition. *Not a single one of the many reclamation projects has paid out.* Many of them still owe the whole debt to the government. Data of this kind is seldom given publicity.

President Calvin Coolidge in his report to congress in 1934, stated very clearly that the basic object of the Reclamation Act of 1902 had been completely ignored. He showed that unless the Bureau of Reclamation was reformed, these government irrigation projects in future would provide more temptations for profiteers than opportunities for farmers. Has the millenium yet arrived? At that time congress seemed more influenced by politics and didn't agree with the President. They charged off about \$26,000,000 as a total loss to taxpayers. Although they abandoned several projects on which millions of dollars had been already blown in, they extended the time from twenty to forty years for the farmers to pay up.

About ten years later congress opposed an irrigation scheme in Wyoming on the grounds that it would never pay out. However, the Casper-Alcova project was put through contrary to the opposition of congress by the Bureau of Reclamation on funds supplied by PWA. With PWA funds in the hands of the Bureau, they had \$227,000,000 allotted to dam builders and ditch diggers. According to the county tax assessor in Wyoming, *the land to be irrigated was worth \$2.50 per acre. It was shown that the cost of irrigation per acre would be \$350.* On account of such a bountiful Christmas gift from the taxpayers, the land owning lobbyists were able to sell this arid land for \$80 an acre.

The National Resources Committee appointed by President Roosevelt stated, "If projects deserve federal contributions, they certainly also deserve local contributions, and unless the local interests are prepared to make appropriate contributions on their own behalf, the federal government normally should not participate in the improvements they seek." This Committee also took the stand that they should not "permit pressure groups and special local interests to obtain unfair advantages at the expense of federal taxpayers."

It is well known that fish resources on the Pacific Coast is a valuable food supply for this nation. The Columbia River produces more and better salmon than any other stream in the world. Rivers in California formerly brought forth valuable salmon runs, and the Sacramento still has a fair run of fish. Apparently the engineers made little study

of salmon in building insurmountable dams. Although those in the Reclamation Service spent vast amounts of money, they destroyed salmon runs by not building fish ladders nor screening irrigation ditches. What were mere fish compared to power and irrigation? Why wasn't there a coordinating board of scientists, economists, and engineers to study all phases of water uses?

The citizens of this nation have irrevocable rights for both mental and physical health obtained from woods, waters, and wildlife, especially as population increases. The recreational value of these outdoor resources attract many travelers to the Pacific Coast. Four or five hundred million dollars are thus annually scattered to the people living in California, Oregon, and Washington.

I can't help but remember in 1923 when certain government officials gave the California-Oregon Power Company the right to build a two hundred foot dam on Klamath River at their own expense, but it was supposed to be a need for the people. The State Fish and Game Commission explained to the voters that this would destroy the fish runs in the Klamath, which were a public value. The people of that state defeated this by 196,000 votes in 1924. There have been vast changes in California since that time.

More Dams

Let us for a moment consider the Shasta Dam over five hundred feet high, now being built on the Sacramento River. This was started by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1938. The plan adopted by the engineers, naturally supported by the farmers, was that the water from the Shasta Dam would be carried clear south across the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and pumped on south to irrigate private lands.

The tremendous cost of such a project running into hundreds of millions would in itself have been appalling. But it is even worse than that according to the Oakland Tribune which says this project "is one of the most colossal oversights in engineering. It was not until both Shasta and Friant Dams had been under construction for more than two years that it was discovered that because of the spongy nature of the delta country it would be impossible to build a canal for the purpose of carrying water from the Sacramento River down to the San Joaquin to be pumped to the lower Central Valley. A dirt ditch would not hold water, and a concrete-lined canal would sink out of sight."

After this night-mare, the engineers of the Bureau of Reclamation are now surveying for two dam sites on the American River with the idea of getting the water from the North to the South for irrigation. All they need now is a few more hundred million dollars from the taxpayers to make up for their mistakes.

According to Joel W. Hedgpeth, a California engineer, "had a complete survey of the irrigation problems and the salmon fishery been made at the outset, before the beginning of construction, it would have been apparent that the American River development would have been more practical as

an irrigation supply and would not have been as injurious to the salmon runs as Shasta Dam is going to be. If this is an example of the sort of thing that the engineers and Planning Boards can do in peace time, we can certainly expect wasteful miscalculations in war time."

I have previously given the data on the Willamette Valley Project in Oregon. The proof is clear that the proposal for seven dams on the Willamette is purely a local grab of federal funds to benefit private individuals and is not a plan for the future benefit of the state, because it would destroy more than the cost of the project in towns, valleys, and fish life. While the local profiteers got this bill through congress, congress has not yet, and we hope it will not, allot funds for these high dams.

In regard to the enormous Grand Coulee Dam, on the Columbia River, it is interesting to note that although it was originally disapproved by congress for the same reason that they disapproved of the Casper-Alcova Project, the Reclamation Service forced it through on PWA funds. As a publicity stunt, they spread abroad this statement. "This project will be self-liquidating from income from settlers and purchasers of power." It has been estimated that their proposed plan will cost the taxpayers over \$400,000,000 to irrigate 1,200,000 acres of land which places a capital mortgage of \$333 on each acre for irrigation. Since the Bureau of Reclamation has not been able to show that a single project has ever been self-liquidating, they should furnish facts and figures of expenditures to the people of this nation.

Now of course there is a tremendous problem on these different things. I wish there was someone here from the Reclamation Bureau to see whether I have made any mistakes. I shall be very glad to apologize if I have.

Now, I just heard last evening that the Fish & Wildlife Service had been allotted eight million five hundred thousand dollars and now the House of Representatives has cut out three million. I feel that an organization of that kind is working for the nation and the people as a whole. If they do not cut out a lot of this other money that is spent for private interests, I think we ought to have that small amount of money spent for the people as a whole; and I hope my friend that follows, will give us some of the information in regard to just what the conditions are.

I know this has just happened and I think we really ought to have a resolution as to what should be done.

Thank you. (Applause) . . .

