



## CONSERVATION OF EARTH RESOURCES: THEODORE ROSSEVELT'S PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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### **Abstract:**

Conservation is the hue and cry of the present generation in this age of Industrialization, Globalization and Crony capitalism. The rampant destruction of forests and mining of natural resources like coal and iron ore has caused greater damage to the ecosystem. Theodore Roosevelt who was the President of United States of America by his Speeches, Acts and Proclamations brought in awareness among the people and lawmaker. Roosevelt protected a large area of forest from destruction by the private enterprises which have already denuded half the timber wealth of United States of America. He was very conscious of passing to the future generation a country which was vibrant with the rich natural heritage. He by Public Lands Commission (1903), The Inland Water Way Commission (1907), National Conservation Commission (1908), The North American Conservation Conference (1909) brought in pragmatic and futuristic approach in conservation of Earth Resources.

*"The more closely we scrutinize Theodore Roosevelt's life and the more carefully we consider his many ventures in totally different fields of human activity, the less likely we are to challenge the assertion that his was the most interesting career ever vouchsafed to any American"*

*- Prof. Brander Mathews, Columbia University.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Introduction:**

Economic advancement does not reduce a society reliance on forest products. As countries develop wood remains a basic raw material for construction furniture, railroad - power poles, plastics, industries and household. Forests provide natural heaven of inestimable value while trees provide shade and beauty. Forests also perform irreplaceable ecological services. They assist in the global cycling of water, carbon-di-oxide, oxygen and nitrogen. They lend stability to hydrological systems, reducing severity of floods and permitting the recharging of springs, streams and underground water.

With the new millennium it is necessary to provide great additional buildings for the business of the government. The growth in the need for the housing of government is a proof to indicate the growth of United States of America and the sphere of action of national government.<sup>2</sup> The economic growth that the country witnessed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century caused a greater concern, as the natural resources were destroyed and wasted in the hands of private enterprises. Roosevelt was the man who felt that if such a growth went unabated, the country would become unfit for the future generations to live. He felt that preservation or replacement of forests as one of the most important means of preventing such a loss. He elaborated in the timer famine and the growth of timber utilization exceeding three times the annual growth of the country.<sup>3</sup> This paper elaborately narrates the conservation efforts taken by Theodore Roosevelt as President of United States of America.

### **Theodore Roosevelt:**

Theodore Roosevelt was one of the most remembered Presidents of the United States. This multifaceted man has great many other things as well. His achievements are impressive as Governor of New York, Vice President, President, Deputy Sheriff in the Dakota Territory, Police Commissioner of New York City. He became the President of United States of America by 42. In Foreign affairs he led United States into the arena of International Power Politics thrusting aside the American Tradition of isolationism, while on the domestic scheme, reversed the traditional federal policy of laissez-faire, and sought to bring order, social justice and fair dealings to American Industry and Commerce. Roosevelt established the Department of Commerce and Labour. He played a vital role to end the Russo-Japanese war and his negotiations won him the Nobel Peace Prize.

*"Of all the public men that I have known, on both sides of the Atlantic (and there are few that I have not known in the past thirty years), he stands out the greatest, and as the most potent influence for good upon the life of his generation."*

*- Viscount Lee of Farchem*

In his days as President of United State Twice, Roosevelt identified conservation of Natural Resources as the fundamental and compelling problem that was faced by the United States.<sup>4</sup> The natural wealth of United States was calculated to be inexhaustible as it was new found land. Technology, economic progress and large scale industrialization paired with newly formed urban settlement has by 1901 cut down one half of United States timber resource and had washed away in calculable extent of rich top soil.

His specific achievements are numerous. Perhaps his greatest contribution was his work for conservation of natural resources. Roosevelt most lasting and significant contribution to the world was the permanent preservation of some of the most unique natural resources of the United States. Roosevelt's visionary thinking of conserving earth resources though meet stiff resistance were successfully implemented with the help of Mr. Gifford Finchot who was later appointed as Chairman of National Commission for Conservation. During his tenure as President Roosevelt brought in many Acts and Proclamation to bring in more forest lands under Federal Protection. Even after demitting office he relentlessly worked for conservation by contributing to American Museum of Natural History and by expeditions in the Amazon.<sup>5</sup>

Roosevelt during his reign stressed that the natural resources are exhaustible and there should be careful use of them for our future generations. He further came down heavily on the injudicious consumption of coal, iron ore and natural gas. He lambasted on the pattern of growth that has been witnessed by exhaustion of natural wealth by putting the life of future generation in misery.<sup>6</sup> He also stressed upon the use of waterways. In his annual message to the congress in 1907 Roosevelt expressed his view of developing National Water Highways.

#### **Vision on Natural Resources:**

"The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others."<sup>7</sup>

According to Roosevelt there must be realization of the fact that waste, destruction and exhaustion of natural resource would undermine the days of our children. He during his period through several forums created awareness and made people to plan and orderly develop natural resources instead of haphazard striving for immediate profit. During his seventh annual message to the Congress Roosevelt spoke that great river systems should be developed as National Water Highways with Mississippi, Columbia and many others. From the great lake to the Mississippi, there should be a deep waterways leading from it to the East and the West The incalculable benefit of such a scheme is receiving of freight carrying congestion on railroads.

Development of waterways was believed to simultaneously solve water problems in many areas. Roosevelt was a visionary for non conventional energy resources. He with statistical evidence argued that dams could produce thousands of horse-power, the annual value of which would exceed the annual value of the products of mines. These national water highways in a way would prevent Hood in delta region and make them fertile farming regions. As a result Theodore Roosevelt appointed a Inland Water Ways Commission to conduct a comprehensive study. Roosevelt urged the Federal Government to seriously devote itself to the task of better utilization of waterways and water power, bristly, irrigation and the reclamation of loads.

#### **Conservation Efforts:**

"Optimism is a good characteristic, but if carped to an excess, it becomes foolishness. We are prone to speak of the resource of this country as inexhaustible, this is not so". Commented Roosevelt in his seventh Annual message to Congress in December 3, 1907. Theodore Roosevelt felt the need for conservation of forest area. Soil erosion for instance is among the most dangerous of all wastes in US. Prevention or replacement of forests is the most important method of preventing loss. In India British colonial rule introduced scientific forestry and created forest reserves in a bid to conserve the fast depleting natural wealth, indiscriminate felling of forest for timber was felt in US. Roosevelt predicted that the country would witness a timber famine which would be felt in every household. The annual consumption of timber was three times greater than the annual growth, and the Theodore felt that if the consumption and growth rate continue unchanged practically timber would be exhausted in a generation.

When Roosevelt became the President twenty percent of forested territory was reserved us national forests. But these reserve forests do not include the most valuable timber lands. The area of the United States placed under Public Protection by Theodore Roosevelt as National Parks, National forests, reserves of bird and other federal reservations worked to a total of approximately 230,000,000 acres. The forest of the United States went from approximately 43,000,000 acres to about 194,000,000 acres. Under Roosevelt this represents an increase of over 400%. The area of forest reserves established by Roosevelt is greater in area than France, Belgium and the Netherlands combined.<sup>8</sup> By 1905 Roosevelt transferred the Division of forestry to the Department of Agriculture from the Department of Interior. Gifford Finchot was appointed as the first chief of the United States Forest Service.

Roosevelt policy of forest reserves was opposed by commercial and other interests favouring unrestricted exploitation of natural resources. He emphasized that mineral wealth of the country viz., coal, iron, oil, gas and the like would never reproduce itself and therefore would ultimately exhaust. He in his autobiography recorded that he by a proclamation in 1907 saved sixteen million acres of timberland in Northwestern states as national forests before the land grabbers could get them.<sup>9</sup>

Roosevelt had a strong conviction that "all the great natural resources which are vital to the welfare of the whole people should be kept either in the hands or under the control of the people."<sup>10</sup> Roosevelt in his tenure created 150 National forests, 51 Federal Bird reserves, 4 National game preserves and 5 National parks.

Roosevelt conducted many conservation conferences and setup conservation commissions between 1901-1909. The following are worth mentioning here:

- ✓ The Public Lands Commission constituted in October 1903 to study Public: Land Policy and Laws.
- ✓ The Inland Water Way Commission setup in March 1907 to study river systems.
- ✓ The Conference of Governors in May 1908 to consider the Problems of Conservation.
- ✓ The National Conservation Commission formed in June, 1908.
- ✓ The Country Life Commission constituted in August 1908 to study the status of rural life.
- ✓ The Joint Conservation Congress in December 1908 to receive the three volume report of the National Conservation Commission.
- ✓ The North American Conservation Conference in February 1909.

After the conference, briefing the press Roosevelt said "It is evident that natural resources are not limited by the boundary lines which separate nations, and that the need for conserving them upon this continent is as wide as the area upon which they exist". The conference of Governors in May 1908 led to the appointment of 38 State Conservation Commissions. Roosevelt's other work for conservation as President included the withdrawal of coal, mineral, oil, phosphate and water-power site lands from private exploitation. Thus the step forward approaches of Theodore Roosevelt has helped United States to strive forward during challenging times for a promising future generation.

Many have commented that Theodore was unaware of the existing tension between the economic growth and environmental balance. But the fact is that he was instrumental in establishing 150 National Forests, 29 National Parks and planted two billion trees.<sup>11</sup> In one of his speeches he addressed the people to preserve the forest, use them so that they are not squandered and wasted and make it beneficial to the present and the days to come.<sup>12</sup> Environmentalists of the modern times have recognized, the key to conservation movements in United States was Theodore Roosevelt which had fought to protect the nature of the country.<sup>13</sup>

**Conclusion:**

He by his speeches, action and by convening conference created awareness among the people and law makers of the two domestic problem (ie.) forest and water problem. He succeeded in setting aside almost 150,000,000 acres of timber land and about 85,000,000 acres of mineral lands in Alaska. We could very well assertively state about Roosevelt's eagerness to pass on the wealth of nature to the forth coming generations. Though some of his Hydro Projects were against the will and wish of nature, there has been no greatest transformation in United States towards Conservation and all remains are testimony to his futuristic approach.

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