

It is not many decades ago that the people of the United States thought of their resources as being illimitable and as being open to exploitation in any way that might suit best the needs of the moment and the production of a profit. It seemed inconceivable that there had to be any care in their application or use or that a situation could ever arise in which the resources would seem inadequate. We all know how that picture has changed. In some places even the air that people breathe is becoming a scarce resource as pollution of industries fouls it. For many cities the problem of water supply is exceedingly difficult and expensive - partly because the requirements of today were not foreseen in time, drainage basins were not protected, pollution was permitted, ground-water levels were allowed to fall, and many other problems were made inevitable because of inadequate planning and coordination. The Paley Commission recently reviewed the resource situation in the United States and in almost every field it pointed to the shortages that will affect that country in the years immediately ahead.

To some degree we in Canada stand today where the United States stood four or five decades ago. It is our responsibility to do whatever we can to ensure that these priceless resources are used wisely, are used to produce a perpetual wealth of benefits, and are used as an integrated whole to secure the optimum advantage for all the people of Canada.

It was in the light of the above considerations that the Prime Minister of Canada indicated on February 12, 1958, the decision of the Federal Government to consult with the provinces about the calling of a National Conference on Conservation. The Prime Minister was, of course, well aware of the measures that have been taken in the past - and that are being continued today - for discussion and co-operative work in particular resource fields. We have periodic meetings at governmental levels and also among non-governmental organizations in the fields of mining, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, and so forth. These are highly desirable and they have been most productive and helpful. We have not, however, since the turn of the century called together a group of the responsible governmental and other agencies to take a look at the complex of our resources as a whole. It is in this regard that it seemed to the Federal Government that there was scope for a new initiative that might be of great value to the country as a whole. We felt that the governments and other agencies by sitting down together could review the policies that have been followed and the work that has been done in order to see whether there are any shortcomings in it - whether there are gaps that should be filled - whether there are new lines of action that ought to be taken. There is value in assessing our present position, in looking at what the future will bring, and in considering how best we can meet the needs that we can foresee.