



The "State of the Environment" Address

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Good afternoon. It is my sincere pleasure today to address the members of the Minnesota Legislature, members of the Subcabinet, and distinguished environmental leaders from around our state, as we expand upon the Governor's State of the State message and review the State of the Environment in Minnesota.

I want to congratulate you, and your predecessors, on the good state of our environment and natural resources today. This is no small accomplishment. Minnesota is richly endowed with a treasure of natural resources that make this state a great place to live and work. Consider the following:

- o We have more than 30 million acres of farmland, some of the very best farmland in the world.
- o We stand on top of nearly one trillion gallons of ground water which we can tap for our farms, our industries and our homes.
- o We have more than 12,000 lakes and over 90,000 miles of rivers and streams which if laid end-to-end would circle the earth 3 1/2 times. Not surprisingly, we own more boats per capita than any other state, better than one for every seven residents, and we have over 2.5 million anglers.
- o We have more than five million acres of wetlands that help purify our waters and provide tremendous wildlife habitat.

- o We have more than 18 million acres of forests for timber production, wildlife and recreation.
- o And we have what is probably the finest public recreation system in the country, with 64 state parks, hundreds of county and city parks, the Boundary Waters Wilderness, Voyageurs National Park, which just received a \$2.7 million federal development grant, and 3.3 million acres of state and national forest lands available for recreation.
- o We have more public hunting area than any of the lower 48 states: six and a half million acres, enjoyed by some 650,000 hunters.
- o We also happen to have over 8,000 miles of trails for hiking, skiing and snowmobiling, and that's the number one state trail system in the United States.

Now, I think those are some pretty impressive numbers, but they only begin to tell the story of our rich natural resource heritage. That 30 million acres of farmland and trillion gallons of ground water support our number one industry - agriculture - which generates \$7.1 billion a year in economic activity and 40% of our jobs. Our lakes and rivers, our forests and park systems are the backbone of Minnesota's second largest industry - tourism - which employs 100,000 people and each year brings in \$4 billion

to the state's economy. And those 18 million acres of forests support the state's third largest industry - forestry - which chips in \$1.9 billion a year and provides jobs for some 52,000 Minnesotans.

All this adds up to one conclusion: Our environment and our natural resources form the indisputable foundation of our state economy and our quality of life. It also underscores the tremendous responsibility we share as stewards of this resource treasure. We have been entrusted with much, and thus far we have upheld that trust.

We have done so because the people of our state demand nothing less. We are proud of our environmental heritage, and our citizens have repeatedly insisted, through our Legislature, that our environment should be second to none in this country. We have fashioned ourselves into leaders and innovators, and the rest of the nation looks to us for solutions to environmental problems.

From 1931 when the old Department of Conservation was created, to 1967 when the Pollution Control Agency was born (three years ahead of the federal EPA); to such bold initiatives as the Waste Management Act, the Acid Deposition Control Act, and the State Superfund; to the strong wetland protection programs we have implemented; Minnesota has been a consistent leader in environmental protection and in intelligent use of resources.

This was recognized last year in a study by the Conservation Foundation, a national conservation group, which rated Minnesota number one of all 50 states in our efforts to protect the environment.

It's been very tempting for those of us in government to take the credit for this extraordinary ranking, but again, the real credit must go to the people of Minnesota, who through effective citizens groups and elected officials have demonstrated a deep commitment to maintaining a healthy environment in which to live, work and recreate.

And today - in 1984 - we must again call upon that deep commitment as we continue our important efforts. Despite our number-one ranking; despite the fact that our air is cleaner, our waters cleaner, and our land cleaner than 10 years ago; some very serious problems remain, problems that are more complex than past issues, and which pose greater challenges as we look for solutions.

One of the most vexing problems we face is, of course, acid rain. A great deal has been said and written about acid rain, and I don't need to go into great detail here. We know that the only real solution is to cut back the air pollution that causes acid rain, and as a state, we are again at the forefront of that effort. But it is painfully clear that we can't stop acid rain by ourselves; that national action is needed, and it is

needed now. Our research indicates that up to 80 percent of the acid rain falling on Minnesota comes from air pollution sources outside the state.

We have a great deal at stake, and here are some grim reminders:

- o up to 2,500 lakes or 25% of our fishing lakes, are sensitive to and threatened by acid rain;
- o 3.5 million acres of Minnesota forest soils, about 20 percent of our forested lands, are sensitive to acid rain;
- o up to 1.2 million acres of peatlands may be affected by acid rain.

Altogether, we believe that about 15 percent, or 8 million acres of Minnesota's forests, peatlands and watersheds are sensitive to acid deposition. These areas cover much of eastern and northeastern Minnesota and include some of our most prized recreation areas - the BWCA, Voyageurs National Park, and even parks and forests in the Twin Cities.

As I pointed out earlier, these are not merely environmental concerns. Acid rain is a very real economic threat to two of our three largest industries: forestry and tourism. Agriculture, though not currently

threatened, could be affected if rainfall becomes more acidic in the future. The long-term vitality of our forestry industry is threatened by slow degradation of forest soils. As far as tourism is concerned, one study shows that the first signs of lake acidification in the BWCA could result in an annual loss of about \$40,000,000 per year and 3,000 jobs. That represents only a fraction of the total tourism and sport fishing industry in Minnesota.

The damage already inflicted on lakes and forests in New England, Canada, Scandinavia and Germany is nothing short of tragic.

We cannot and will not wait around for such a tragedy to occur in Minnesota. We are taking care of our contribution to the problem through the Minnesota Acid Deposition Control Act, and we have now moved our battle to Washington. Certainly we don't know everything there is to know about acid rain, and we support further research. But we do know enough to recognize that we need national controls, now. We need to cut the amount of sulfur oxides presently emitted into the nation's skies by 50 percent or 12 million tons per year.

We are working with Senator Durenberger and Congressman Sikorski, who have sponsored acid rain bills, and with

other Congressional leaders and the National Governors Association to develop legislation that is politically acceptable to all affected states, and which will achieve our goal of stopping acid rain before it is too late. It may require Minnesotans to help other states pay for reducing emissions, but we believe that the benefits to our lakes and forests would be worth the investment.

No discussion of Minnesota's environment can continue for very long without coming back to the issue of water. Water is obviously essential to all states, but in Minnesota it is more. Water is the very lifeblood of our state, and in a very real sense, it is our identity. Even the name "Minnesota" means, in Sioux Indian language, "clean water". Minnesota is water.

Water is a basic necessity for citizens and industry. It is one of the most precious commodities on earth, and industries and whole regions of the United States are already casting thirsty and covetous glances at our abundant supply.

Through a federal, state and local partnership, we have made significant improvements in the quality of our surface waters by building new and better wastewater treatment systems. But that job is far from over. We must renew our commitment to upgrade wastewater treatment

throughout the state, to protect our waters and allow for economic expansion.

We will not be able to rely on federal grants for wastewater treatment as we have in the past. We must therefore become self-sufficient and develop our own State Construction Grants program to assist communities with their wastewater treatment needs. The state grants bill before you this session is a solid investment in our environment and our economy.

Most of our past efforts to protect Minnesota's water resource have focused on our lakes and rivers. We obviously cannot afford to neglect our major surface waters, but it is clear that ground water has moved to the forefront of our environmental protection efforts, and appropriately so, as 70 percent of our citizens rely on ground water for domestic use.

The most prominent and well-publicized threat to our ground water is hazardous waste. Past incidents of hazardous waste management have contaminated or threatened our ground water at over 61 known sites, and we expect to find more.

Fortunately, we are well on the way to cleaning up the most serious of these sites, thanks primarily to the

new State Superfund law. I am pleased to report that clean drinking water is now available through Superfund to all citizens of Minnesota whose water has been found to be contaminated by hazardous waste. We are now able to step in if needed and provide clean drinking water, and conduct cleanup operations if the responsible parties cannot or will not.

Superfund was a very difficult but badly needed piece of legislation. Despite misgivings about the bill, Minnesota industry has come forward and cooperated very well with the cleanup effort, and Minnesota industry should be commended.

There is much cleanup work remaining to be done under Superfund, and we will continue to investigate problems from past disposal such as those recently discovered at Adrian and Long Prairie.

At the same time, we must continue to do a better job of managing the 174,000 tons of hazardous waste that we currently generate each year in Minnesota. Through careful tracking of wastes under the MPCA's "cradle-to-grave" regulatory program, we are avoiding some of the mistakes of the past that now have to be cleaned up.

We are presently wrapping up the process of revising the state hazardous waste rules to conform with the federal regulations. This will bring about next January something we have all wanted for several years: an end to the present cumbersome situation where Minnesota industry must comply with two sets of hazardous waste regulations.

But our efforts have to go beyond better tracking. It is time for Minnesota to actively seek out and promote alternatives to land disposal of hazardous waste; in other words, we must reduce, reuse, recycle, neutralize, process and incinerate the waste so that disposal is truly the last resort, not the first. The premises behind the 1980 Waste Management Act have not gone away. Minnesota absolutely must take care of its hazardous waste at home. We cannot continue to export our waste to other states indefinitely.

Overall, I am optimistic about the hazardous waste problem. The Legislature has given state government the basic tools to clean up past problems and to deal effectively with our present and future waste management needs.

Unfortunately, hazardous waste is by no means the only threat to our ground water. As our understanding of

this tremendous underground resource increases, so does our knowledge of its vulnerability. Solid waste disposal is just one of several major problems we face in protecting our ground water from contamination.

I believe that solid waste in a broad sense is a problem of equal or even greater proportions than hazardous waste. We generate four million tons of trash every year in Minnesota, enough to fill a convoy of garbage trucks five abreast from Lake of the Woods to the Iowa border. Our chief management strategy for what has been called our "gross national byproduct" has been, since the beginning of time, to dump it; to bury it out of sight, out of mind. Our technique has been to "throw it away", and now there is no more "away."

Landfilling - even careful, state-of-the art, everything by the rules landfilling - has been artificially cheap. But we are time and again seeing that the apparent low cost of landfilling is a mirage. In reality, we have been writing I.O.U.'s to our environment. Many of our 130 existing landfills are leaking, and their predecessors, the 1,200+ open dumps that have been closed around the state, may be leaking into ground water as well.

It is clear that the time is now for Minnesota to send this message across the state and the country: landfills are obsolete. I believe that the solid waste legislation authored by Senator Gene Merriam and Representative Darby Nelson does just that. This important legislation recognizes that we have to face up to the true costs of landfills, and that we have to get serious about resource recovery, which at present only takes care of five percent of our solid wastes. The potential is there for resource recovery to take care of up to 65% of that waste, through recycling and energy recovery systems. It will not be easy, but again, prevention of ground water contamination is our objective, because cleaning up ground water contamination is orders of magnitude more expensive.

Other threats to our ground water that need to be addressed include leaks from pipelines and underground storage tanks; leaky septic systems; surface impoundments of liquid waste; and agricultural chemical seepage.

We will also maintain and increase our vigilance in maintaining the quantity of ground water in Minnesota. Under its ground water appropriation permit program, which was established in 1937 after several years of drought, the DNR is able to control and monitor ground water pumpage. With the increasing household and

agricultural demands on our ground water supply, the DNR is stepping up its ground water management program. Using funds from the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, the DNR is expanding its ability to monitor ground water supplies and develop allocation models to protect this critical resource.

In the coming months, we will be carefully evaluating our state ground water programs to ensure that our water is protected from contamination; that we continue to monitor ground water quality; and that all withdrawals, discharges and recharges of ground water are managed in concert with our non-degradation objectives.

Another important water quality issue is wetlands protection and control of nonpoint source water pollution. One ecological lesson we have learned and must not forget is the role wetlands play in purifying surface and ground water. Wetlands retain many of the nutrients that would otherwise fertilize algae and weeds in our lakes and rivers. Through this nutrient retention and through their ability to aid in flood control, wetlands also serve as a critical source of recharge to our ground water aquifers.

Wetlands in the past have been drained at an alarming rate across the country. However, our state has again

shown leadership and foresight in the wetland protection program of the DNR. Since 1979, the DNR's innovative "Water Bank Program" has preserved close to 3,000 acres of wetlands that would otherwise have been drained. These wetlands and others will be added to the more than 260,000 acres of wetlands currently protected by the DNR. We must continue our strong commitment to protecting these natural pollution control partners, for they are vital to our water and wildlife resources.

We also must come to grips with the related problem of runoff water pollution. We estimate that more than half of the water quality problems in our lakes and streams is due to runoff from agricultural lands, urban storm water, and other nonpoint sources. This is doubly unfortunate because it means we are losing precious topsoil and nutrients from our farms and cities. Soil erosion continues to plague our state and the nation, and has the potential to result in tragic consequences to our farm economy.

In addition to protecting our air, land and water from pollution, this administration is committed to cleaning up visual blights on our environment. The Governor's Quality Environment Project is initiating programs to clean up junkyards, railroad ties and old tires.

These beautification efforts will help make our state even more attractive for tourists and development.

I've touched on the major existing environmental problems we are continuing to address in our state. But what about the future? Can this state continue to develop its abundant natural resources and maintain our high quality environment at the same time? I am firmly convinced that the answer is yes.

Forestry, for example, has a tremendous growth potential. At present between 20 and 25,000 acres of renewable timber are harvested each year. The DNR estimates that this renewable harvest could be doubled.

Under the DNR Accelerated Forest Management Program, which began four years ago, reforestation has increased five fold. Through planting, aerial seeding and natural reforestation, an estimated 27,000 acres of forests are renewed each year, outpacing the present harvest.

Another resource with potential in Minnesota is peat. We need to encourage the careful development of our peat lands; we must take a page from the lesson book of the Europeans, who have learned how to wisely use this multi-purpose resource, for fuel, for horticulture, and for a host of other uses. At the same time there are peat lands

that need to be preserved as the special unique wilderness areas they are, and the Department of Natural Resources is conducting an accelerated program to catalogue and provide necessary protection for these unique areas.

Both our forests and our peat lands are part of the solution to a very real problem, and that is Minnesota's need to become energy independent. We are as poor in native energy resources as we are rich in water. We presently pay over 3.5 billion dollars a year (more than half our total bill) to suppliers outside the state. We need to keep that money at home, and make ourselves less vulnerable to supply disruptions. Therefore, we must give our home grown alternative resources - such as peat, wood-waste, biomass and hydropower - a greater role in meeting our energy needs, and equally important, we must continue to promote energy conservation.

I believe that careful development of our forests, our peat lands, our minerals, and all of the abundance of our natural resources is compatible with the historical commitment of Minnesotans to protect the environment and preserve public lands for recreation. We have learned our lessons from past environmental mistakes, and have put in place the safeguards needed to ensure smart, environmentally sound development. In other

words, we don't have to be afraid of developing our natural resources. Rather, we must encourage smart development, using our knowledge and commitment to simultaneously foster needed development, nurture a clean environment, and protect the fragile natural resources that support our economy and excellent recreation.

The Conservation Foundation study that ranked Minnesota number one in environmental protection efforts also reached another equally important conclusion - that a state doesn't have to weaken its environmental standards to attract industry. It refuted the argument that tough pollution regulations were driving industries south to states with weak environmental programs.

Both of these conclusions effectively summarize the essence of what makes Minnesota work: that a healthy economy and a clean environment are more than just compatible - they are interdependent.

Sigurd Olson often spoke of the need to develop a proper relationship with the land. I think that in Minnesota we are closer than ever, and closer than any other state is, to achieving that ideal relationship. We have grown up. We will not accept mindless

exploitation of our resources. We will promote careful development that protects the delicate natural systems that support us.

The state of our environment is good, and getting better. Much work remains to keep it that way. The deep, unflagging commitment of you and of all our people will continue to make Minnesota the best place to live in this country. Thank you.