

The Secretary of State is authorized and directed to report this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register*.

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 2.

### **Remarks on Steps To Remove the American Bald Eagle From the Endangered Species List**

*July 2, 1999*

Thank you very much. I have to tell you I was very moved by that. Let's give him another hand. And all these young people, I thank them. [*Applause*]

Thank you, Levar. Thank you, members of the Earth Conservation Corps. I'd like to thank all the adults and sponsors who are here with them today, and one strong supporter of this program that is not here, my good friend Ethel Kennedy. I thank her and all of you for what you have done to give these young people a chance to contribute to the conservation of their community and to earn some money to go on with their education.

I'd like to thank Secretary Babbitt for his outstanding leadership in this regard. He has been a wonderful, wonderful steward of our Nation's fish and wildlife and natural resources over these last 6½ years, and I'm grateful to him.

I'd like to thank George Frampton, who works on these issues for us here in the White House; Jody Millar, the recovery coordinator for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I'd like to recognize in her absence Jamie Clark, the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, who I believe is absent because she's about to have a baby, which is a good way to support species preservation. [*Laughter*]

I'd like to thank Al Cecere and the great eagle, Challenger, who are here. They look very good today together, and I thank them for coming.

This is a special day for us to be having this announcement, because we're about to enter the weekend to commemorate the very last Independence Day of this century.

Yesterday Hillary and I joined a number of people at our National Archives to celebrate this Fourth of July with a renewed effort to give a special gift to America in the new millennium—the preservation of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Today we honor the living symbol of our democracy, the American bald eagle. It was, in fact, on July 4th, 1776, the very day the Declaration of Independence was signed, that our Founders first considered the question of a fitting emblem for our Nation. Believe it or not, Ben Franklin wanted our national symbol to be a turkey. The press would be having a field day with that to the present day, wouldn't they? [*Laughter*]

Fortunately, in this case, Mr. Franklin, who had a lot of good ideas, had this referred to committee. [*Laughter*] Three committees, in fact, and finally, 6 years later, the Continental Congress approved a design for the Great Seal of the United States, a proud bald eagle—wings stretched wide, an olive branch in one claw, 13 arrows in the other. A “free spirit,” said Thomas Jefferson, “high-soaring and courageous.”

Yet, years later, even as its likeness was known world over and the very symbol of our might and our independence, here in America, the eagle struggled barely to survive. At our Nation's founding, as many as half a million bald eagles soared the skies in North America. Two hundred years later only a few hundred breeding pairs remained in the lower 48 States. Our majestic eagle was slipping toward extinction. You just heard Levar's story about Washington, DC, and the Anacostia.

But the American people decided to do something about it. First, we banned the pesticide DDT which had poisoned the eagles' fragile eggs. The naysayers said if we did so, it would wreck the economy. And, as we had seen before then, and time and again since, the people who say improving the environment will wreck the economy are wrong. We've done reasonably well with the economy while we brought the bald eagle back.

But banning DDT was only the first step. People all across our Nation banded together to guard nest sites; to nurse injured birds, like our friend Challenger, here, back to

health; and like Levar and all of his young colleagues who are here with us today, to reintroduce eagles in places where they had long ago disappeared. Most important of all, we made the Endangered Species Act the law of the land, declaring that extinction is not an option—not for the eagle, not for other creatures put here by God.

Thanks to these efforts, the bald eagle is now back from the brink, thriving in virtually every State of the Union. When I became President, I'm proud to say, my State had the second largest number of bald eagles in the country. But now they are everywhere, and we are very, very happy about it.

Today I am pleased to announce that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking the first step to remove the American bald eagle from the endangered species list. It's hard to think of a better way to celebrate the birth of a nation than to celebrate the rebirth of our national symbol.

The return of the bald eagle is a fitting cap to a century of environmental stewardship, charted for us in the beginning by one of our greatest conservationists, President Theodore Roosevelt. I am proud of what we have tried to do to fulfill his legacy—from the Yellowstone to California's ancient redwoods to the Mojave Desert to the spectacular red rock canyons of Utah. And just yesterday Vice President Gore announced the largest environmental restoration effort in history, our plan to save the precious Florida Everglades.

In all these efforts we honor Teddy Roosevelt's ideal of leaving our Nation even a better land for our descendants than it is for us. And now, on the threshold of a new century, at a moment of unparalleled prosperity, we have an historic opportunity to deepen our commitment to conservation and to make it permanent.

The balanced budget I proposed for the coming year includes \$1 billion for a lands legacy initiative, the largest annual investment ever proposed for the protection of America's lands. This initiative would expand our efforts to preserve critical wildlife habitat and other national treasures. It would provide new assistance to communities to protect farms, city parks, and other local green spaces.

In addition, I have also proposed guaranteed funding of \$1 billion a year every year to sustain these efforts into the new century. I was disappointed that earlier this week committees in both the House and the Senate voted to cut deeply into this request of the coming year, including funds to help to keep other wildlife from becoming endangered in the first place. All through our century we have found ways to pull together across party lines to stand up for the environment, for wildlife, for our natural heritage. I hope we can do that again.

It took all Americans to save the bald eagle—people in places where you would expect the bald eagle, and people in places where we had forgotten the bald eagle ever existed, like Washington, DC. Now that we have the bald eagle back, let's get the spirit behind the bald eagle back, and put America back on a bipartisan American course of conservation of our natural resources.

You know, when Hillary talked to me about starting this millennium project and devoting ourselves this year and next year to giving gifts to the country for the new millennium, she came up with this phrase, "honor the past and imagine the future." More than any other area, the environment and dealing with our natural resources gives us a chance to do both things at the same time. By saving the bald eagle and bringing it back home to the Nation's Capital, these young people have honored our past. They have also imagined a future in which we give all of our children a chance to get a good education and to have a good income and a thriving economy where we no longer destroy our natural resources, but instead, build them up. It is the past, and it must be the future.

Thank you very, very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:22 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Levar Simms, member, Eagle Corps, a program of the Earth Conservation Corps; and Al Louis Cecere, founder and president, National Foundation to Protect America's Eagles, who handled the eagle.