

May 27 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

The White House,
May 27, 1999.

NOTE: The notice is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

The President's Radio Address *May 29, 1999*

Good morning. This holiday weekend, when millions of Americans are taking to beaches and lakes and trails, I want to talk to you about new ways we can work together to protect the natural treasures we all share.

Today I'm speaking to you from the banks of the St. Mary's River in northern Florida, near the Georgia border, in one of the most impressive nature preserves Hillary and I have ever seen. Our visit here reminds us once again what a gift it is to spend time outdoors, to walk among tall trees, to see wild animals and rare birds, to watch the Sun set and the stars come out over a beautiful river. It also makes us appreciate the generations of Americans who fought to preserve the parklands and the beaches we all enjoy today.

For the past 6 years, Vice President Gore and I have worked hard to advance the ethic of environmental stewardship. We've protected more than a million acres in the spectacular red rock canyonlands of Utah, in priceless stands of ancient redwoods in California. We've reduced toxic air pollution from chemical plants by 90 percent and cleaned up more toxic waste sites than were cleaned up in the previous 12 years. We saved Yellowstone Park from the threat of nearby gold mining, and we've taken major steps to protect our water resources, from the precious Florida Everglades to the tap water our children drink.

Today I'm proud to announce three new executive actions to improve the quality of our water and the health of our families. First, I'm directing the National Park Service and other agencies to expand public health protections on the thousands of miles of stunning beaches managed by the Federal Government, including Cape Cod, Cape Hatteras, and California's Point Reyes. And I challenge the States to improve their water quality standards. Second, I'm directing the EPA to develop stronger measures to prevent sewage spills, the major cause of beach closures. Third, I'm directing all Federal agen-

cies to adopt a comprehensive strategy to better safeguard rivers and other bodies of water on Federal lands.

Of course, there are other important environmental and public health challenges we must address. The balanced budget I submitted to Congress earlier this year contains historic investments to improve the quality of life, save more land, and deal with the challenge of climate change by helping communities protect farmlands, parklands, and other green spaces, rewarding consumers who buy cars and houses that reduce greenhouse gas pollution, controlling polluted runoff to lakes and streams, and improving the quality of air we breathe.

Unfortunately, even as we work to raise the level of environmental stewardship for the 21st century, some in Congress are intent on rolling back many of the gains we've already made in this century. With little fanfare, the leadership in the House and the Senate just released spending guidelines that would impose drastic cuts in environmental protection and public health. These cuts could stall toxic waste clean-ups and undermine our efforts to ensure safe drinking water, to improve air quality, and to combat the threat of global warming. They could even force us to shut down some of our national parks.

What's more, we've already seen troubling signs that Congress again will try to gut environmental protections by tacking provisions called riders on to their budget bills. I urge Congress to end these sneak attacks on our environment once and for all.

We often speak of building a country where our children have an opportunity to do even better than we've done. In part, of course, we refer to the economy, the opportunities we create for our children to secure a good education, a good job, and raise a family in a safe neighborhood with good schools, but we also refer to our natural world. We know our children cannot

do better tomorrow if we're willing to squander precious environmental resources today.

More than ever, the American people recognize the inherent value of pristine peaks, unspoiled beaches, clear and safe water. They believe in the value of environmental stewardship. I think all of us believe in the value of that stewardship.

Now is the time, on the edge of a new century, for us to unite as Americans and chart that course of stewardship. We must work to-

gether to leave our land, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "an even better land for our descendants than it is for us."

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 2:34 p.m. on May 28 at the White Oak Plantation in Yulee, FL, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 29. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 28 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Memorandum on Clean Water Protection

May 29, 1999

Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

Subject: Clean Water Protection

Fifteen months ago, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, my Administration set forth a vision for a new generation of clean water protection through our Clean Water Action Plan. The Action Plan strengthens protections for our Nation's waters, addresses the remaining sources of water quality impairment, and provides the tools and resources that States, Tribes, and communities need to control pollution on a coordinated basis throughout their watersheds.

The Action Plan recognizes that despite significant progress, the challenge for all of us in protecting our Nation's waters remains unfinished. The health of our people continues to be threatened by exposure to harmful organisms in our waters; consumption of fish from many of our waters presents a threat to the most vulnerable among us; polluted runoff has for too long eluded remedy using conventional approaches. The Action Plan was coupled with a challenge to the Congress to reauthorize and strengthen the Clean Water Act, but the Congress has yet to act on this challenge.

As we begin the beach-going season, when families are reminded again about the importance of clean water to their recreation, their well-being, and the economy, we remain anxious to work with the Congress on strengthening the Clean Water Act. We must not wait for the Congress, however, before using our available

resources and authority to further accelerate the effort to protect America's waters and the health and safety of the American public.

Accordingly, I direct you to take the following additional steps, consistent with the Clean Water Act and the Clean Water Action Plan, to protect public health and clean water.

First, I direct the Park Service and other units of the Department of the Interior to strengthen water-quality protections at all beaches managed by the Department. Improved monitoring should be used wherever necessary to enhance the public's right to know that beaches are safe for their families and to assist the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), States, and Tribes to identify and stop the causes of beach closures.

Second, I direct the EPA to work with the States to expedite the pace at which they will strengthen their beach and recreational water quality standards, so that the public will be able to enjoy the same strong level of protection at all the Nation's beaches no later than 2003. In accordance with the EPA's Beach Action Plan, the EPA should promulgate standards in cases where a State does not amend its water quality standards to include the EPA-recommended criteria in a timely manner.

Third, I direct the EPA to improve protection of public health at our Nation's beaches by developing, within 1 year, a strong national regulation to prevent the over 40,000 annual sanitary sewer overflows from contaminating our Nation's beaches and jeopardizing the health of