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THREE LETTERS TO THE NATIONAL IRRIGATION CONGRESS.*

THE LETTER FROM GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT.

ALBANY, N. Y., NOV. 16, 1900.

TO THE NATIONAL IRRIGATION CONGRESS,

Chicago, Illinois.

Gentlemen:

It is with very real regret that I find my engagements here prevent my attending the meeting of your body. I believe to the last point in the vital necessity of storing the floods and preserving the forests, especially throughout the plains and Rocky Mountain regions. The problem of the development of the greater West is in large part a problem of irrigation. I earnestly believe in the national government giving generous aid to the movement, for it is not possible, and if it were possible, it would not be wise to have this storage work done merely through private ownership; and owing to the peculiar necessities of the case, much of the work must be done by the National and not by any State government.

Moreover, it is not only necessary to establish a great system of storage reservoirs to prevent the flood waste of the waters; it is also necessary to preserve the forests on the mountains and among the foothills. This means that, in the first place, there must be a wide extension of the existing system of forest reserves, and, in the second place, that these forest reserves must be managed aright. They cannot be so managed while there is the present division among federal departments of the duties, and, therefore, of the responsibilities, of their management.

We are just getting to understand what is involved in the preservation of our forests. Not only is an industry at stake which employs more than half a million of men, the lumber industry, but the whole

*These three letters were read before the recent session of the National Irrigation Congress held in Chicago from Nov. 21st to Nov. 24th.

prosperity and development of the West, and indeed ultimately of the entire country, is bound up with the preservation of the forests. Right use of the forests means the perpetuation of our supply both of wood and of water. Therefore we cannot afford to be satisfied with anything short of expert and responsible management of the national forest reserves and other national forest interests. The forest reserves must be cared for by the best trained foresters to be had, just as the storage reservoirs must be built and maintained by the best engineers. There is the same need of trained skill in handling the forests in your best interests as there is in building the great dams which will some day bring population and abounding prosperity to vast stretches of so-called desert in the West.

Any man who has ever dwelt on the great plains knows what a serious matter not only the water supply but the wood supply is to the farmer, and of course every miner knows the same thing. Not only does the farmer need the water which the preservation of the forests itself also preserves, but he needs the wood too. So does the miner, so does the manufacturer, and so does the railroad man. The reservoirs cannot last if they fill full of silt, and the only way to prevent this filling with silt is to preserve the forests themselves. The forest is a great sponge for absorbing and distilling water. It is the great preventor of erosion, and erosion is always the danger point in any irrigation system.

Without pretending to outline definitely a working scheme, I venture to point out that without the attainment of the following objects your plans must measurably fail:

First. Government study of the streams upon which your plans depend.

Second. Government construction and control of great irrigation plants.

Third. The preservation of forests by

the extension of the forest reserve system, and hence of government control of the forests.

Fourth. National protection and use of the forests under expert supervision.

Fifth. I urge you to see to it that private owners of forests in the West and East alike understand that timber can be cut without forest destruction (the Department of Agriculture will tell them how) and that the ownership of water rights in the arid country, and of forest lands anywhere, entails public as well as private duties and responsibilities.

The East is interested in the commercial development of the arid lands of the West, just as the West is interested in the proper development of our harbor system and of our commerce on the high seas. No part of this country can be permanently benefited without a reflex benefit to the other parts. As Americans we are all interested in the progress of any part of our common country, and while your movement is of immediate benefit to the West, its ultimate benefit will be shared by the East as well. I earnestly hope that all far-sighted citizens, whether they dwell on the Atlantic or on the Pacific seaboard, or in the great Mississippi valley, will appreciate this, and that Congress will give to your efforts the substantial backing that they deserve.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed.) THEODORE ROOSEVELT.