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C. Louise Cross' statement on the environment

C. Louise Cross

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Attachment #3
Mrs. C. Louise Cross, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture

January- February 1, 1972

JOINT HEARING OF COMMITTEE ON BILL OF RIGHTS AND
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURE

Mr. Chairman:

Members of Committees on Bill of Rights and Natural Resources and
Agriculture:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This morning I appear before you as a citizen of the state of Montana. Though I am a delegate to this Convention, I represent no organized group. I suppose you might say that I am speaking for those people in this state who cannot be here to speak for themselves, but are greatly concerned about our natural resources and our environment. This is one of the reasons I became a candidate for the Convention, and I also firmly believe that this is one of the reasons I won.

My decision to appear as a witness before this hearing was arrived at after seven days of listening to arguments or reasons defending the status quo. There comes a time when the status quo is not good enough -- either in the lives of individuals or in the affairs of men. It has become increasingly clear that the status quo is woefully lacking as far as the environment and the use of natural resources is concerned. If this were not so, the outcry would not be so great. We have reached a point where nature no longer has the ability to restore what man consumes. Not too many years ago, it was thought that water, given enough miles, could clean itself. Now we have dead lakes and streams devoid of aquatic life. As one wag put it -- too thick to drink and too thin to plow. If you swim in the old swimming hole, you do so at your own risk. It has been

estimated that water pollution is costing 12.8 billion dollars in damages (Gazette - Jan 13, 1972).

How many times have you said that air was free? The time is at hand when air is no longer free because pollution has made it expensive. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimated that it now costs the nation some 16.1 billion dollars a year in material losses - lost working hours because of health effects and damage to plant life and property. (Gazette, January 13, 1972). Yet, there are those who would like and are trying very hard to convince Montana's State Board of Health to reduce its clean air standards to those more lenient national standards. As recently as yesterday more influential voices were added to such pressures.

Last week we (Committee on Natural Resources) were told that management of the forests should be left to those who knew how to do it, -- that clear cutting was one of the best ways to rid a forest of diseased and old timber, and that nature had done this for centuries by fire. Again it has taken a public outcry against this practice to expose it. The Bitterroot forest is probably the worst example of clear cutting by commercial loggers. Where profits are concerned, no industry can be trusted to regulate itself. (Gazette, Jan. 2, 1972)

Last week, I also heard that we consider Makoshika Park a natural wonder, yet we consider the spoil banks at Colstrip and in other areas where strip mining is done as ugly. It took nature thousands of years to produce Makoshika Park -- furthermore, it is not devoid of either plant or animal life. Man does in a few weeks what it has taken Nature to do in centuries.

The ravages of strip mining have been so all encompassing that

there has even been consideration of banning that type of mining all together.

Within the past few days, it was announced that 40,000 acres in Dawson County have been leased for strip mining, and that another 80,000 acres had also been leased in other counties of eastern Montana. Under present Montana reclamation laws, this could very well be disaster as far as the land is concerned. As far as can be determined, actual reclamation of strip mined land is negligible. And only where it has been required by law has it been undertaken. "Reclamation efforts are officially described as 'behind schedule'". (Time Mag. - Mar. 22, 1971)

An opponent to strip mining in Kentucky, Paul Ashley, says: "They've destroyed the mountains..... They've destroyed the timber. They've destroyed the streams, and their coal trucks have destroyed ^N roads." -- If you think it will be any different in eastern Montana, I'm afraid you are sadly mistaken. It was pointed out in a recent hearing that present legislation in Montana does not give the department of State Lands the authority to prohibit strip mining -- only to require the best possible reclamation plan available under the circumstances at the time of mining.

In some parts of Europe, strip miners are required to restore the land to the condition which they found it -- "with rocks and subsoil below and topsoil above, all limed, reseeded and fertilized." (Time - Mar. 22, 1971)

During the past few days I have also heard arguments to the effect that individuals really don't have the right to a healthful environment -- because it is too hard to define the term "healthful"

-- nor can the term "esthetics" be defined because what is esthetic to one person is not to another. Does plant life have to disappear before it can be determined that some element in air emissions is the cause? Do animals -- domestic and wild -- have to die before an environment can be determined as not healthful? Do people have to become ill or drop in their tracks before the word "healthful" can be defined?

As far as the definition of the word "esthetics" goes, it is unfortunate that man is a very adaptable creature. He can manage to survive in pitiable conditions and abject misery -- witness the POW camps, displaced persons on almost every continent, the 4th and 5th generations of poverty stricken people in Appalachia, where incidentally, strip mining has been going on for decades.

For too long we have depended on the "experts" -- "The average man has been given a tremendous inferiority complex in an era of specialization" -- and the veneration of experts is one of the chronic diseases of our times. Like other human crises, in the crises of the environment, it has been the professional who has gotten us into trouble, and the amateur has bailed us out. I have a great deal of confidence in the solid good sense of the average Montanan, and as I can determine it, the average Montanan wants to protect his environment and wants to conserve his natural resources.

Between the knowledge that our economy must proceed, and that man must rise above his own immediate gain, the delegates to this Convention must decide what they shall do.

I have been aware of the pressures that will come -- indeed have been coming. Pressures from those who must return money to their investors; pressures from those who must promote employment; pressures

from those who must maintain a tax base; and pressures from those who fear the loss of a livelihood.

Somehow your elected delegates must exercise prudent judgment without yielding to pressures not commensurate to the cause ^{they} they all must serve.

"If Beasts and Birds Abound No More
and Fish Grow Scarce on Every Shore --
What Chance Have You and I, My Friend,
to Meet a Different Gladder End?" Anon.