

US Senator Jon Tester
Keynote Address – Montana Audubon Society
Great Falls, Montana
June 6, 2009

Thank you, Janet [Ellis], for that kind introduction. It's great to be back in Great Falls. I'm honored to have the opportunity to say a few words to the distinguished folks of the Montana Audubon Society.

I want to speak tonight about Montana's outdoor heritage. And I want to talk a little bit about my work in the United States Senate to safeguard that heritage for future generations.

Like the mission of the Montana Audubon Society, my work in public life first and foremost is on behalf of my kids and grandkids; and your kids and grandkids.

- Environmental protection.
- Investment in education and worker training
- Improving health care for our families
- Or any other issue,

I work as your Senator to support policies that will improve the world we will leave behind for future generations.

First, let me start by thanking the leaders of the Montana Audubon Society for your many contributions toward building a better Montana. Janet has been a friend and ally for many years, going back to my time in the state legislature. She's a real pro and a credit to this organization.

I also want to mention a couple of your board members who are good friends of mine. Harriet Marble from Chester and Judy Tureck from Coffee Creek have done great work for many years. Steve Hoffman, your Executive Director, runs a first-rate organization. And Amy Cilimburg has done some important work on the issue of climate change and all the challenges it entails. Finally, let me congratulate George Engler for his Lifetime Achievement Award and Lisa Flowers for winning the Educator of the Year Award. I commend you all for your achievements.

You know, growing up on the family farm my grandparents homesteaded nearly a century ago, I learned early to take the responsibility for the stewardship of the land. My little slice of heaven in North Central Montana is precious to me, and I have always worked to run the farm mindful of the impact on our planet. Since my wife Sharla and I made the transition to organic farming two decades ago, we have maintained farming practices that produce good, healthy food and conserve more of our natural resources.

I know that conservation ethic is what drives the folks of the Montana Audubon Society, particularly when it comes to birds and other wildlife as well as their habitat. I know that your members hail from all corners of our great state. From the Bitterroot Valley to Fort Peck and from Miles City to Whitefish. And everywhere in between.

And I know that you are dedicated to protecting Montana's many special places, what I like to call God's infrastructure. From Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks to Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge and the Rocky Mountain Front.

Montana's outdoor heritage is alive and well thanks to the leadership of the Montana Audubon Society. Your work on behalf of native birds, other wildlife and their habitats fulfills a vital niche among the state's many and disparate outdoors enthusiasts. I know that your emphasis on wetlands, riparian areas, prairie and sagebrush serves our state well.

In the U.S. Senate, I've worked with Montana Audubon Society and other conservation groups to boost essential federal funding to promote these efforts. I serve on the Senate Appropriations Committee and the key subcommittees on Interior and Energy and Water. Although I'm still relatively new to these committee assignments, I'm not at all new to these issues.

For example, last year I introduced the Cooperative Watershed Management Act to encourage the formation of watershed-wide management groups. This legislation recognizes that most water quantity and quality issues are best solved at the local level through the consensus of various stakeholders. It provides funding through the Interior Department to bring together all stakeholders to make important decisions for watershed management. I am pleased Congress passed this bill earlier this year, and President Obama signed it into law.

I have also long been an advocate for federal funding for habitat protection, particularly when it comes to water. Water is the critical resource in Montana. I was pleased Interior Secretary Ken Salazar traveled to Helena earlier this year to announce important new funding for these priorities. Ken is a good friend. As a Coloradan, he knows and understands the challenges and opportunities we face in resource management in the West. I'm glad we have an active and effective partner in this key federal post.

Overall, I think the Obama Administration will provide much more visionary leadership when it comes to resource management than we've seen in the past many years.

Obviously, the issue of climate change is hugely important to Montana Audubon and all Montanans. I know well Amy Cilimburg's good work on this issue at the state level. In Congress, most recent attention has been focused on the Waxman-Markey bill in the U.S. House. The Senate will have its own version, probably later this year.

I'm often asked what I think about climate change. I think climate change is real, and we need to do something about it. We also have to do it right, and that starts with promoting clean, green renewable energy.

Montana is the mother lode for renewable energy. Wind. Solar. Geothermal. Bioenergy from crops that don't compete with food. We've got it all. Take wind, for example. For generations, Montana farmers like me have cursed the wind. Whether it's blowing snow into unpassable drifts or blowing vital topsoil from our fields, wind has always been a general pain in the neck.

Now we have found a way to harness the wind and turn it into electricity. We are harvesting that energy in a way that makes sense for the long haul and provides jobs and profits right away. We can do it in the right places so it doesn't harm wildlife. And it lessens our need to burn more fossil fuels.

We have similar opportunities with other renewable resources. All it takes is the vision for a sustainable future and working together to get it done.

Let me wrap up by making an observation. As many of you know, I'm a big fan of our Founding Fathers who wrote our Constitution and established our democratic institutions that have stood the test of time. That founding generation was the product of what's come to be known as the Age of Enlightenment. And their radical theory was that human beings can govern themselves through the exercise of reason. By thinking for themselves and finding balance among many needs.

That balance in the natural world is a lot of what wildlife conservation is all about. As Aldo Leopold put it in [A Sand County Almanac](#), and I quote at length:

'The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: "What good is it?" If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of eons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.'

Those of us making public policy would do well to aspire to "intelligent tinkering." I appreciate the efforts of the Montana Audubon to achieve that goal.

In conclusion, let me say again how grateful I am for all your work to protect and promote Montana's outdoor heritage. And to pass it on to future generations. Your work will benefit our kids and grandkids, which is what I strive to do every day as your Senator.

I hope that we can continue to work together. I wish you the best of luck with the rest of your weekend. And I ask you to keep in touch.

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