"Conservation," said America's first forester Gifford Pinchot, "means the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time," and demands "the application of common sense to the common problems for the common good."

In 1983 as the new Congress begins setting its agenda -- economic, environmental, and otherwise -- we must look back to see where we have come before charting where, now, we must head. And for land and water conservation, the last decade has been a time of substantial progress.

The nation's air is generally much cleaner since passage of the Clean Air Act in the early 1970s. From 1974-78, the number of unhealthy air days in 23 major metropolitan areas decreased 18 percent. Nationwide, average annual concentrations of suspended particulates fell by 7 percent, sulfur dioxide by 20 percent, and carbon monoxide by 33 percent.

In the Denver area where much remains to be done, ozone levels dropped by a third from 1976-81, and nitrogen dioxide dropped 18 percent from 1975-81. Levels of carbon monoxide, the chief component of the "Brown Cloud" and still a serious air quality problem, exceeded EPA standards 58 percent fewer days from 1975-81, falling from 75 days a year to just 31.
Trout are returning to what was one of the most polluted rivers in New Hampshire, salmon have returned to the Connecticut and Penobscott rivers, and the Winooski River in Vermont is now swimmable. Since the U.S.-Canadian Great Lakes Water Quality agreement, DDT in Lake Michigan has dropped 90 percent since 1969, the phosphate content of Lake Ontario has been substantially reduced, and loading of toxic substances in Lake Huron is on the decline. All five lakes have witnessed enormous visual improvements and shoreline property values are going up rapidly.

Meanwhile, downtown Denver's South Platte/Cherry Creek system has come from its mid-1960 rating as one of the worst polluted rivers in the country to its classification today as a warmwater fishery, in which 90 percent of the contamination has been eliminated and 17 varieties of fish recently were counted.

Colorado big game increases include deer: up 10-15 percent in the last 10 years; elk: doubled in the last 20 years; and bighorn sheep: more than doubled during that same time. While from 1900-70 there were virtually no river otters in Colorado, in the last eight years 75 have been introduced in historic habitats like the Colorado, Piedra and Gunnison rivers. Down to just two in 1975, the state's peregrine falcon population now numbers at least 170, with 10 of the original 35 breeding sites re-established.

All progress of which justifiably we can be proud. But much remains to be accomplished.

Vigilance continues to be the goal in further reducing air and water pollution. Acid rain has arrived in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain West, where high mountain streams and lakes are particularly
vulnerable to damage by high acid PH balances. This problem needs intensive study and action.

What daily occurs to the nation's topsoil -- five billion tons blowing and washing away by wind and water each year due to overplowing and overuse of fragile native soil -- may turn out to be literally a life or death issue for millions of people.

And people -- the tremendous and explosive growth expected in human population -- may be the most alarming fact to be considered in setting our national and congressional environmental agendas for the coming years. By 2000, world population is expected to be 150 percent of today's level, nearly doubling in some of the poorest countries.

Faced with these trends, Congress in its last session made some progress toward achieving, environmentally, what it must. Legislation was passed protecting the nation's wilderness areas from energy and mineral development. I co-sponsored and the Senate passed a bill protecting 200,000 acres of fragile barrier islands strung like a necklace along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and preserving rich aquatic, bird and wildlife ecosystems. And a proposal I sponsored and which was long in the making was passed to allow limited off-tract oil shale leasing, thus allowing the Rio Blanco Co. to continue work on its Colorado shale project.

But Congress has much, much more to accomplish. As I see it, the new session's environmental agenda must include:

*Passing legislation discouraging the plowing up of erosion-prone topsoil. A bill I have sponsored would prohibit government price supports, crop insurance and disaster payments for any crops grown
on fragile lands not cultivated during the previous 10 years. While not dictating to farmers what they can do with their land, this measure would go a very long way in halting loss of topsoil which is virtually irreplaceable -- it takes an estimated 100 years to replace one inch of it. The Senate passed this bill last year, but the House failed to act on it.

*Addressing another type of water pollution -- not from toxic wastes or chemicals, but natural salts -- by passing the Colorado River Salinity Control Act. I sponsored this bill to authorize 11 new projects for controlling the steadily rising and increasingly detrimental salt level of the water. Last year the river did some $100 billion of damage to western cropland and water systems and carried a staggering 10 million tons of dissolved salt, a salinity level well above EPA's maximum safe drinking water standard.

*Completing Colorado's national park wilderness system by passing the Colorado Wilderness Act, which I will sponsor again this year. Picking up where RARE II left off, the bill extends wilderness protection to the 8,000-acre Spruce Creek area near Aspen, to Dinosaur National Monument, Rocky Mountain National Park and the Colorado National Monument.

*Enacting legislation protecting a dozen rivers nationwide, including Encampment River in Colorado, while they are reviewed for possible wild and scenic designation.

*Studying the inclusion into Hovenweep National Monument of adjacent and araelogically important land containing examples of Anasazi Indian culture.

Finally, in all its policymaking, Congress and all who are
environmentally concerned can contribute to achieving 'the most
good for the most people' by fostering balance and moderation.
Public discussion of natural resource issues has become strangely
and bitterly divided between the extreme policy poles of development
and preservation. Neither Colorado nor the nation are well served
by any policy produced from the mutual cancellation of two extremes.

For instance, environmental protection goals are not anti-
business ones, but instead just another cost of doing business.
The most direct way of protecting our environment is to internalize
environmental costs in a finished product and leave the marketplace
free to judge its value. The cost of coal-fired electricity, for
example, should reflect not only the cost of mining, transporting
and burning the coal, but also the cost of smokestack scrubbers
and land reclamation.

Similarly, business and conservation are by no means the
natural enemies people often take them for. Consider that there
are more than 600 companies, employing hundreds of thousands of
people around the country, manufacturing multi-billions of dollars
worth of air and water pollution control equipment alone.

While not so very long ago, recycling was an idea scoffed at,
today, hundreds of new companies are in the thriving business of
collecting and reprocessing paper and metals otherwise replaced by
further resource consumption...in short, aiding to the maximum
extent possible those working for conservation and environmental
safety goals.

The challenges of our modern environment are vast. But with
open-minded foresight, balance and moderation, we can and will meet
them, head on.