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The Quiet Crisis

Stewart L. Udall
Iowa State University

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The Quiet Crisis

Most Americans find it difficult to conceive a land ethic for tomorrow. The pastoral American of a century ago, whose conservation insights were undeveloped, has been succeeded by the asphalt American of the 1960's, who is shortsighted in other ways. Our sense of stewardship is uncertain partly because too many of us lack roots in the soil and the respect for resources that goes with such roots. Too many of us have mistaken material ease and comfort for the good life. Our growing dependence on machines has tended to mechanize our response to the world around us and has blunted our appreciation of the higher values.

There are many uprooting forces at work in our society. We are now a nomadic people, and our new-found mobility has deprived us of a sense of belonging to a particular place. Millions of Americans have no tie to the "natural habitat" that is their home. Yet the understanding of the grandeur and simplicity of the good earth is the umbilical cord that should never be cut. If the slow swing of the seasons has lost its magic for some of us, we are all diminished. If others have lost the path to the wellsprings of self-renewal, we are all the losers.

—*STEWART L. UDALL*