sensed four or five years ago that I was beginning a journey that would eventually bring me before The Humane Society of the United States. It was a journey the implications of which I didn't fully understand. I began with my acquaintance with Jan Harte [president of HSUS affiliate EarthKind (USA)] in New Mexico, on the ski slopes of Colorado, and in a variety of other places. In the course of this acquaintance, Jan drew me ever so thoughtfully into the issue of compassionate treatment of animals.

I grew up in a rural tradition where these we wasn't exactly the issues of the day! I grew up in a rural tradition which, for all of its strengths, was uniquely thoughtless in the treatment of animals and the extent to which the human spirit and human compassion is a factor in our relationship with the rest of Creation. It has led to the thoughtless destruction of habitat, the extinction of species, the presence of man, and the pain, suffering, cruelty, and extinction.

I feel I'd like to talk about biodiversity issues. Biodiversity, in my judgment, is really about whether or not the human species has the self-control and the ability to live lightly on this planet with space for the rest of Creation. It's deeply involved in the shape of our industrial society, population issues, the way we develop land, and ultimately it's going to mean changes in the spirit and lifestyle of a lot of people.

Right now, there are in the United States two pieces of legislation of great importance that relate to the biodiversity issue, and I think we need to understand them. They're not the ultimate answer, but they're the entering wedges. They are already under fierce assault from the people who would say the role of the human species is not stewardship, it is the untrammeled right to destroy anything, anywhere, at any time. The debate is inevitably going to get very intense. We can't take the gains for granted. The first statute is the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Unlawful Killing Act, passed in 1973, was an extraordinary achievement, probably the most revolutionary environmental law of this century. It explicitly says, when a species begins the downward slide toward extinction, the response will be a habitat-protection plan. It's a criminal offense to take either that species or its habitat. It's been a resounding success over the last twenty years. Of course, we ought to be dealing with these issues before a species reaches the emergency room and in a much more aggressive way. The ESA has nonetheless been an extraordinary success. It has led to the revival of many species at the brink of extinction. One thinks of the bald eagle, the peregrine falcon, the American alligator, the black-footed ferret, and others (the successes are never advertised).

I've just come from a long and difficult struggle in the state of Nevada over a habitat-conservation plan for the desert tortoise, a species in deep trouble because of pulmonary infections transmitted from domestic tortoise species that have now invaded the entire tortoise habitat of the Great Basin. We have worked to put out a habitat-conservation plan that is beautifully simple. It says to developers in the Las Vegas area as they begin to irrigate upon their tortoise habitat, You're going to have to pay a fee into a conservation fund for every lot that is sold or developed in Las Vegas. That's a very effective biodiversity law and it says to developers in the Las Vegas area as they begin to irrigate upon their tortoise habitat, You're going to have to pay a fee into a conservation fund for every lot that is sold or developed in Las Vegas. That's a very effective biodiversity law.

Unfortunately, it was defeated in November. Ten years ago the initiative would have had a very narrow constituency. But it came in the context of broad support from the entire environmental movement, with a deep understanding that a society that is going to be able to think in a reasonable way, cently get caught in the desperate state and die an agonizing death under the desert sun can't possibly have the time and the chance to wrestle with all of the issues of habitat, biodiversity, and living thoughtfully on the land.

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The environmental movement has been a good while coming. The environmental movement has been a good while coming. It's been a long and difficult struggle in the state of Nevada over a habitat-conservation plan for the desert tortoise, a species in deep trouble because of pulmonary infections transmitted from domestic tortoise species that have now invaded the entire tortoise habitat of the Great Basin. We have worked to put out a habitat-conservation plan that is beautifully simple. It says to developers in the Las Vegas area as they begin to irrigate upon their tortoise habitat, You're going to have to pay a fee into a conservation fund for every lot that is sold or developed in Las Vegas. That's a very effective biodiversity law. It's not commonly understood by most Americans that biodiversity and the human spirit, the need to relate to Creation, to be sensitive to the realities of our mistreatment, and to have a larger, holistic, spiritual view of what Creation is about.

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changed the definition of wetlands. I’ve eliminated fifty million acres, one half of the entire wetland base of the United States.

We must protect those laws and at the same time start to think even more broadly about how we preserve space on this planet. The problem is a land-use-planning issue, an environmental issue, and a spiritual issue. Such concepts are very strange in our culture, particularly in the western United States, but we have to have vision and the courage to continue expanding the concepts.

I really have two tasks: one—tough enough—is to take care of what we have within our jurisdiction in the United States of America. There’s a broader world out there, and we can’t turn our backs on that broader world because there really aren’t boundaries anymore. We live in a unified world economy, but we also live in a borderless, ecological world. Everything we do affects everybody else.

The extinction of a species is a permanent loss for the entire world. It is millions of years of growth and development put forever forever. How do we extend our reach around the world? How do we react to the slaughter of elephants in Africa for ivory signature stamps in Japan; the ravaging of the white and black rhino populations for dagger handles for young men in Kuwait, Oman, and the Middle East; the looming extinction of tropical parrots and macaws in South America? These birds are captured for buyers in the United States who will pay up to $30,000 for a luscious macaw. You can stand on docks outside of Manaus and other towns in the Amazon and see confiscated crates with blue-and-yellow macaws, their feet taped, their beaks wired, stacked up like cordwood in boxes. They have a fatality rate of 50 percent by the time they’re smuggled into Miami.

What can we do together to stop the incredible onslaught of destruction and violence against all over the world? To answer that question, I’d like to tell you about a young man named Sam LaBudde, who lived in San Francisco, at the instigation of the Earth Island Institute, bought a video camera and went to Enamal Island. He hired on to a Panamanian tuna boat posing as a fisherman, went to sea for three months, and filmed the use of purse-seine nets to encircle dolphins. He brought those films back; they played on NBC some months later and created an outcry from the American people. Sometimes people seem to have an endless capacity to tolerate brutality and the suffering of animals, but at other times something comes at exactly the right moment and gets a reaction. In the wake of that outcry, lawyers went to court and forced the Department of Commerce to enforce the MMPA embargo provision, closing American markets to tuna exports from any nation using purse-seine nets to encircle dolphins. The protection provisions comparable to those of the United States. Kicking and screaming, the Bush administration finally locked down the trade embargo. The American people, through legislation and court action, backed up by public understanding, have begun to change the fishing practices of every nation in the world because of the power of our market, our consumers who insist on dolphin-free tuna. Purse-seine fishing on dolphins is on the way out because few nations are going to be willing to violate these standards if they’re denied access to American markets.

We in the United States have the power to stop such destruction by displaying the leadership that says: If American markets are not going to be open to people who brazenly and blatantly violate common, accepted standards of conduct. We’re not going to be able to do it in the rest of the world unless we take the moral high ground at home. It’s risky to dictate standards to the rest of the world, but I think we have the capacity to do it if we have a policy that’s not selective, not species-specific but rather one that says, ‘We’re going to live on this planet in harmony with the rest of Creation. We are going to be outraged and indignant at senseless cruelty to animals. In the process of exerting that moral authority, plus [using] the stick of closing our markets, we’ll bring the rest of the world along.’

Although that bill was signed by the president, no one enforced it; nothing happened. Then, in the late ‘80s, a young man named Sam LaBudde, who lived in San Francisco, at the instigation of the Earth Island Institute, bought a video camera and went to Enamal Island. He hired on to a Panamanian tuna boat posing as a fisherman, went to sea for three months, and filmed the use of purse-seine nets to encircle dolphins. He brought those films back; they played on NBC some months later and created an outcry from the American people. Sometimes people seem to have an endless capacity to tolerate brutality and the suffering of animals, but at other times something comes at exactly the right moment and gets a reaction. In the wake of that outcry, lawyers went to court and forced the Department of Commerce to enforce the MMPA embargo provision, closing American markets to tuna exports from any nation using purse-seine nets to encircle dolphins. The protection provisions comparable to those of the United States. Kicking and screaming, the Bush administration finally locked down the trade embargo. The American people, through legislation and court action, backed up by public understanding, have begun to change the fishing practices of every nation in the world because of the power of our market, our consumers who insist on dolphin-free tuna. Purse-seine fishing on dolphins is on the way out because few nations are going to be willing to violate these standards if they’re denied access to American markets.

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