

Environmental Policies Attacked

The Reagan Administration has come under renewed attack for its environmental actions in a lengthy report just published by the Conservation Foundation in Washington, D.C. The foundation, a generally nonpartisan research organization, concluded after an 8-month study that the President and his appointees have sharply curtailed environmental research and enforcement in critical areas, with the result that the long-term environmental outlook seems discouraging.

The report, entitled *State of the Environment 1982*,* is noteworthy for its breadth and its blunt appraisals of the condition of the environment. It was prepared as a follow-up to previous such assessments written annually by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) under previous Administrations. The earlier reports achieved wide circulation as standard reference works. Under the Reagan Administration, however, the reports have been delayed because of cutbacks in the CEQ budget, and at one point last year were thought to have been eliminated altogether.

It was then that the foundation decided to prepare its own analysis at a cost of roughly \$300,000. The result is a 400-page document that examines nine different aspects of environmental quality, from underlying economic trends to water resources and hazardous wastes. "We were hopeful that some constructive things would come out of this Administration," says Terry Davies, the foundation's executive vice president. "Now, having waited a year and a half, nothing constructive has come forth." The conclusion is made more significant by the group's conservative reputation and by the inclusion, on its board of trustees, of several prominent Republican politicians, including two former governors and Pete Wilson, a candidate for governor of California.

The report says that the Administration's emphasis on "deregulation, defederalization, and defunding" has disrupted the bipartisan support for environmental protection. "It [the Administration] has pursued its domestic goals with such single-mindedness, so aggressively, as to allow conservationists no alternative but to protest."

Particular concern is generated by the curtailment of funds for research, monitoring, and planning, the report states. "The information base for environmental policy, always weak, is likely to be even weaker in the future. We will be less able to sort out important problems from unimportant ones, less able to tell which environmental programs are working effectively and which are not." The report cites, among many examples, a sharp cutback in personnel at the Environmental Protection Agency office that organizes and interprets trends in air quality, the elimination of most environmental forecasting throughout the government, and a cutback in funds for a network of stations that monitor national water quality.

Reductions in regulation are occurring at a time when new environmental problems have appeared and old ones have not been solved, the report states. Water quality is increasingly worsened by toxic pollutants, resulting in hundreds of well closures throughout the country. Soil erosion and exploitation of natural resources are increasing, the report says.

The Reagan Administration's response to these problems has in part been to turn the responsibility for their resolution over to state and local governments. Ernst Minor, appointed by Reagan to CEQ, says that the forthcoming CEQ report (describing environmental quality in 1981) will emphasize the virtues of such decentralization. "The proper role of the federal government is in a partnership," he says.

In contrast, the foundation report states that the effect of the Administration's "partnership" has been to leave financially strapped communities with too much responsibility for environmental study and regulation. William Reilly, president of the foundation, says that "today, few state governments are in a position to replace federal expenditures . . . or to establish regulatory standards that may be perceived as driving prospective economic development to other jurisdictions."—R. JEFFREY SMITH

**State of the Environment 1982* (The Conservation Foundation, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036).

modified wording. For example, the bill might be revised explicitly to exempt basic research from the requirement that separate funding sources be identified.

From AT&T's perspective, however, the main problem with Wirth's bill lies not so much in its wording as in its general thrust. "The problem in research and development is a smaller part of a bigger problem stemming from [Wirth's] insistence that Long Lines be walled off from the rest of the system," says Kee-fauver.

Ironically, the consent decree itself, to which AT&T has already in principle agreed, could have as much impact as Wirth's bill on the basic research programs of the Bell Laboratories by removing the guarantee of funding from the operating companies.

According to Penzias, this is part of the price that the company is prepared to pay to enter the data processing field, particularly since it would remain free to manage the laboratories in any way it chose. Although regretting the lost funding, he said that he can "live with" the result, particularly since AT&T has promised to find alternative support.

Others, however, feel the company is making light of the potential impact of the agreement on the laboratories. "What surprises me is that their express concern about Bell Laboratories, and the survival of research at the laboratories, seems to surface more with respect to H.R. 5158 [than the consent decree], because it seems to us that some of the main impacts are embedded in the decree," says John P. Gibbons, director of OTA. "The basic process, by virtue of the consent decree without any legislation, is going to be changed in a very significant way, and we are only left with AT&T saying 'don't worry, we will sustain it.'"

Penzias told the science committee that it was necessary to retain the existing structure of the Bell Labs in order to meet competitive challenges to the U.S. telecommunications industry from both European companies and "Japan Incorporated." Wirth replied by referring to evidence presented to his own subcommittee that one of the best ways to increase international competitiveness was to stimulate competition at home, which his bill was designed to do. Staff members of the telecommunications subcommittee are currently negotiating with AT&T about the language of the Wirth bill, due for mark-up by the full Energy and Commerce committee by the end of June. As for Penzias, "I'm a scientist, and I'd love to go back to working science."—DAVID DICKSON