

SCENIC AMERICA'S SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR SCENIC CONSERVATION

Preamble

America the Beautiful is disappearing. Our magnificent scenic heritage – shorelines, plains and mountains, communities and countryside – is under siege from commercial promotion and haphazard development. Prime farmland and forests give way to subdivisions and office parks while our downtowns decay. New highways rip through pristine landscapes, and “improvements” to older highways often destroy canopy trees and historic structures. Gigantic billboards, look-alike fast-food franchises, towering on-premise signs, unscreened junk yards, power lines, and cellular towers destroy the intrinsic character of towns and neighborhoods.

When we degrade our surroundings we also degrade our sense of who we are, where we came from, and the values we hold in common. The overall appearance of a place has a profound influence on behavior toward that place: ugliness breeds contempt; beauty promotes respect. Growth may be inevitable but ugliness is not.

Scenic beauty has been a powerful force shaping our history, culture, philosophical and spiritual traditions and policies governing natural resources and public lands. Today, however, serious discussion of beauty and aesthetics is nearly absent from public dialogue about the environment. Official declarations on environmental sustainability rarely cite conservation of scenic beauty, quality of life, or community appearance either as primary goals, or as means to other goals. Yet, recent research on visual preferences indicates that there is remarkable agreement among most Americans, regardless of race or economic status, about what is attractive and desirable, and what is unattractive and undesirable.

We believe that America's scenic heritage is fundamentally important to the continuation of our individual and collective well-being, to economic prosperity, to a healthy and sustainable environment, and to the quality of everyday life. We resist the notion that scenic beauty is a luxury, available only to those with the means to travel to protected enclaves or to live in exclusive communities. Beauty should be part of the everyday life of all Americans, regardless of their economic circumstances.

With this Statement of Principles, we invite citizens in communities everywhere to join a movement for scenic conservation as together we lay the “foundation for a scenic century.” (At the end of the Seven Principles for Scenic Conservation, please review “How Scenic Americans Can Act on These Principles”)

Seven Principles for Scenic Conservation

We envision a future in which we...

#1. ...retain the distinctive character of our communities and countryside by rebuilding older cities, towns and suburbs as beautiful places in which to live and work; and conserve agricultural land and open space.

- Set aside open space for greenways, parks, trails and river corridors
- Establish growth boundaries around cities and existing suburbs by protecting farms and ranches from subdivision through agricultural zoning, conservation land trusts, agricultural land banking, and tax abatement; and
- Create incentives for growth to help rebuild older cities and towns, and to create compact, transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use communities.

#2. ...foster new development that respects the special character of places as defined by their distinctive geographical features, cultures, climate and natural systems.

- Encourage communities to identify and map the visual qualities they most value, and then adopt strategies to conserve them;
- Incorporate aesthetics into performance measures for planning, siting and construction of all new development and redevelopment (including franchise development and other commercial and industrial development); and
- Establish comprehensive community tree policies that preserve existing trees, control tree cutting and tree damage during construction, and add new trees to replace those lost over the years to development.

#3. ...encourage a balance of regulatory and market approaches to protect scenic resources including rewarding land stewardship by property owners, local governments and corporations; and providing disincentives for practices that destroy scenic values.

- Provide tax incentives and property tax relief for scenic conservation and good land stewardship;
- Make visual polluters pay by fining those who break the law; taxing those who use the visual environment for commercial advertising based on the true value of their asset; and levying fees for uncompensated use of the roadways to cover the cost of services and access to the public right-of-way.

#4. ...design a national transportation system that respects aesthetic values as well as economic and energy efficiency, social equity, and environmental qualities.

- Encourage excellence in road design and in bridge construction and reconstruction; and allow flexibility in design standards to respect scenic, historic, natural and community values;
- Landscape our highways and community gateways to incorporate native vegetation and to reflect themes of local history and culture; and
- Set standards to keep scenic roads scenic, and protect the views along non-motorized greenways, trails and river corridors.

#5. ...prevent mass marketing and outdoor advertising from intruding on the landscape or community appearance.

- Produce dramatic and immediate results in the scenic character of our landscape by banning the construction of new billboards and strictly regulating existing billboards; using any constitutional means to remove existing billboards within a reasonable period of time; and halting all cutting of trees and vegetation on public land to improve the visibility of billboards;
- Set height and size standards for on-premise signs;
- Promote well-designed logo and tourist-oriented directional signage systems, along with other information technologies to help travelers find the services they need;
- Regulate other forms of outdoor advertising including the exterior of public buses, floating or flying messages, posters on bus shelters and store windows, corporate sponsorship of public service events so as to minimize intrusiveness on our enjoyment of the built and natural environments; and
- Minimize the visibility of cellular communication, utility and energy generation technologies.

#6. ...teach young people to value the visual environment and to create and respect places of beauty.

- Incorporate scenic conservation into all elementary and secondary environmental and geography education curricula;
- Incorporate the values of scenic conservation into graduate courses in economics, planning, design, and public policy; and
- Integrate scenic conservation projects into scouting and school service learning programs.

#7. ...actively engage business, industry, civic and professional organizations in the movement for a more scenic America.

- Promote the link between business and tourism development and conservation of natural, cultural, recreational, heritage and scenic resources; and
- Enlist retired professionals whose skills and political clout can benefit scenic conservation.

[How Scenic Americans Can Act on These Seven Principles for Scenic Conservation]

As citizens, we affirm our intention to create beautiful communities and to conserve the countryside. This means that we will:

- * **Talk** about scenic values to our children, friends, co-workers and neighbors;
- * **Practice** these values on our own property, in our communities and in our places of work;
- * **Speak up** in government forums, particularly the local and regional bodies where most appearance issues are decided;
- * **Work** with local businesses to enhance the character of our community; and
- * **Anticipate** growth and change and take charge of their visual consequences.

Signature

Date