Holst State Forest
by LARRY MOORE and LARRY BAJUK

For nearly 30 years, Iowa State forestry students have had a chance to practice multiple-use forestry on a natural forest in their own back yard. But, for the last 20 years, very little advantage has been taken of this opportunity.

The Holst State Forest has been under Forestry Club administration since the early 1940's. There was considerable club activity on the forest through the 40's and early 50's, but interest slowly died out. Activity in the 60's was sporadic at best. Today, virtually the only club activity on the forest is Fall Forester's Day.

The Ames Foresters of the 1950's report many projects on the forest which were planned, and some which were started. Logging was expected to start in 1950; test plots for wildlife were set up; erosion control plantings were planned, among many others. These projects evidently were not carried out, as no records (outside of the plans reported in the Forester) can be found about most of them.

The only information available about activities in the late 50's are the stories in the Forester. These stories indicate that plans were becoming less concrete and activity was slowing down through these years. In 1961, the Forester stopped publishing stories on the Holst Tract.

Jerry Grebasch, Iowa Conservation Commission Forester for the state nursery in Ames, says that through the years there have been a lot of "grandiose ideas, but they have been mostly lots of talk." Grebasch said that the only real improvements in recent years have been the improvement of the road going into the forest (done by the Conservation Commission) and the building of a fireplace in the forest's supply cabin by ISU students.

There are probably many reasons why interest in the Holst Tract has died. Dr. George Thomson, an Iowa State undergraduate in the 40's, said that the club used the forest more for social events in those days. "Students didn't have the transportation to go home on weekends. Working at the Holst Tract was something to do on Saturdays which would get you away from campus for awhile."

The Forestry Department turned the administration of the Holst Forest over to the Forestry Club in 1947. This did several things which made active management more difficult. Management was now the responsibility of volunteers in a loosely knit organization with a fast turnover in membership.

Keeping accurate, up-to-date records became more difficult. Much research which was done was never compiled, some of what was compiled was incomplete, and a lot of studies and reports have been lost through the years.

Dr. Thomson says that bad record keeping is, "bad management, but is fairly common." He said that the Holst Forest has been cruised numerous times, but that the results of most of these cruises are no longer around. "Most students find cruising more fun than writing the report. Someone always says, 'I'll take it home and work it up this weekend,' and then it's lost."

Thomson said that one student took his cruise data with him to his summer job to write up the report. The student's cabin caught fire and burned down during the summer, and all his data burned with it.

In addition, many cruise reports which were written up are of little value because of incompleteness, omission of raw data and even failure to date the inventory.

Within an undergraduate club, there is a relatively fast turnover of active members. Much of the time, a project is carried out by only a few students. If these students graduate without leaving records or getting other people interested in the project, activity stops.

Another problem with the Holst Forest is that of joint responsibility for its management. The forest was originally ceded to the State Conservation Commission in 1939 by the late Mr. B. P. Holst, Sr., a prominent Boone businessman. In 1940, the Iowa State College Forestry Department accepted the responsibility of management as a demonstrational and experimental area.

The land is still owned by the Conservation Commission and Grebasch says that his joint responsibility has been a hindrance to the management and improvement of the forest. The University has the responsibility of managing the forest and Grebasch says that he has no records on the land from the date of acquisition.

Despite these problems, the Holst Tract is still being used. Dr. Rick Hall is using the forest for classwork in mensuration and silviculture. Hall has established a quarter acre permanent test plot in the forest's red pine plantation for ongoing observations in stand dynamics. Hall said that he also has a number of red pines marked for research on hybrid crosses. He is also planning a planting and thinning exercise for silviculture classes in the spring.

A series of CFI (continuous forest inventory) plots were established in the hardwood stands by Dr. Larry Promnitz's stand dynamics class in November 1974. Promnitz said that a new series of plots needs to be established because some trees in the original plots were cut down for stem analysis.

In the last few years, Forestry-Outdoor Recreation Club has undertaken projects to improve Holst Tract. A sign was installed in Spring 1974 and the gate in Fall 1974. Chairmen of the Holst Tract Committee, Larry Bajuk and Larry Moore, have been standardizing maps, copying aerial photos, and compiling a history of the area to find out what has been done in the past so that a comprehensive management plan can be initiated.
A reminder of the past... yet another unknown, unmarked stake...

One of the "nice" red pine plantations, next to the shed. BA = 160 ft. per acre, too high for this site.

While student interest ranges from very active to apathetic, the Holst Tract still exists. And while the wheels of planning are beginning to roll again, we won't jump to conclusions. If anything is accomplished, we'll be sure to document it all in the next Ames Forester... . . .

A topographic map of the area, source unknown. All maps are being traced and rechecked.
A (not so) typical hardwood stand. Remember, over 60% of Holst Tract has greater than 50% slope.

Shed still standing after many waves of vandalism. Recently, gate blocking access road has helped keep area clean.

A recent addition; a gate closing off the access road to the shed (Fall '74).

Entrance sign re-erected in spring of '74. Will we continue to manage the Holst Tract in the future?