

# Conservation

## Forests and State Parks

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Wisconsin was richly endowed with forests and places of natural beauty. Except for a few comparatively small areas the entire area of the state was timber, - the upper twenty million acres with a forest in which the white pine predominated, but containing such trees as the hemlock, hard maple, basswood, birch and Norway pine. The southern fifteen million acres was a hardwood forest, in which the oaks formed 75% of the entire stand, but which contained in commercial quantities such valuable species as black walnut, black cherry, basswood, hard maple and elm.



Manitou Falls—in the Patterson State  
Park, Superior, Wisconsin.

The entire history of the people of the state has had to do with trees and timber in one way or another, - sometimes the timber growth being of as much harm as benefit, at other times being the means of a livelihood for whole communities. Thus we find the early settlers to southern Wisconsin intent on acquiring land for farms but before cultivation could be carried on the heavy growth of hardwood forest had to be conquered. Little or no market existed for this wood material and as a consequence great quantities of choice log material was rolled into piles and burned. On the other hand, the pioneers to the northern counties were lumbermen. They were interested in pine timber. The opening of the lands of the Mississippi Valley created a great demand for all forms of construction lumber and the comparatively close bodies of softwood timber in Wisconsin drew the early day lumberman, and woods operations became the established and oftentimes the sole industry of the northern part of the state. Many present day Wisconsin cities owe their existence to these early day activities, so that all considered the forest has, still is, and will for many years play an important part in the economic life of the citizens of this state.

In conjunction with the great forest area, the state was abundantly supplied with lakes and streams, so that the area of Wisconsin was virtually an area of woods and waters. Besides the thousands of inland lakes, the streams such as the Wisconsin, Chippewa, St. Croix, and Brule, the eastern shore of this region is washed by the waters of Lake Michigan, the northern shore by Lake Superior, and practically all of the western limit of the state is bounded by the Mississippi River, with its 200 miles of beautiful bluffs. Many picturesque waterfalls, gorges, castellated rock formations and bits of mountainous scenery add to the natural scenic endowments.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find a rather interesting history in connection with the exploitation and development of these resources. Perhaps the first major event in the forest history of the state was the construction in 1831 by Daniel Whitney, an enterprising merchant of Green Bay, of the first sawmill. This mill was built on the Wisconsin River not far north of the city of Portage. In order to operate this mill Mr. Whitney had to obtain special concessions from the federal government at Washington and also had to enter into treaties with the Indians to get permission to take pine off their lands. Lumber had been sawed without the aid of machinery, however, before this in the state.

In fact the timber had been utilized continuously in a small way during the preceding days of French, British and American exploration, but to Daniel Whitney goes the honor of being the forerunner of the modern lumberman in Wisconsin. From that time until 1895 Wisconsin continued to grow as a producer of lumber and other forest products and from 1898 until the present time she has continued to decline. The cut of forest products from 1831 to 1867 increased steadily, but not in any startling fashion. Following the Civil War the settlement of the prairie states commenced in real earnestness, and with this settlement came a great demand for all kinds of construction lumber. This started the real heavy exploitation of the forest resources of Wisconsin and for fifty years the forest industry was the major activity in northern Wisconsin. During these years a great chapter was written in the history of the state. The introduction of steam driven machinery, the band saw, and later the gang and resaw machines speeded up the production of the mills, which in turn resulted in heavier logging operations. Every spring the rivers of the state were choked with logs during the drives and great rafts of lumber were floated from Wisconsin streams into the Mississippi and down to St. Louis and the other central lumber markets. Cities like Eau Claire, Ashland, Wausau, Chippewa Falls, and many others, grew up around the mills and in many of them the industries dependent on the forest still are active.

The strict demands of the consuming public for high



Logging Pine in Bayfield, Wisconsin.

grade lumber and the tremendous supply of this natural resource resulted in a great waste in the early day logging and mill operations. This waste was further increased by forest fires. It was early realized on the part of a few that the scope and recklessness of these operations could not continue indefinitely and soon protests began to arise as to the destructive effects of logging followed by fire. These feelings were translated into legislative action in 1867 by the appointment of a committee to inquire into the methods of logging, the supply of forest products, the effects of clearing the lands and the destructiveness of forest fires. This committee prepared a very comprehensive report. It is particularly interesting from our present day viewpoint. However, nothing further was done and the exploitation of the forest continued on a rapidly expanding scale.

Just thirty years later, in 1897, this question again came into prominence, with the formation of another legislative committee, charged with the preparation of a plan for the proper utilization of the forest resources of the state, the organization of a forestry department and the creation of a forest reserve. This was the first specific move on the part of the legislature to provide ways and means for the replacement of timber supplies on suitable lands in the state. The committee's report was published in 1898 and it included the draft of a bill creating a state board of forestry and providing a code of laws pertaining to forest, field and marsh fires. Nothing was done, however, until 1903, when the first laws relating to forest fires and measures for forest conservation were passed. The law of 1903, however, was very defective, but during the session of the succeeding legislature, in 1905, these forest laws were strengthened and improved on, so as to make them workable. Under the laws of 1905 a state board of forestry was created, to consist of five members, one of whom was appointed by the Governor and the others were ex officio state officials. All affairs pertaining to the state's efforts in fire protection and forest conservation and replacement were placed under their charge. During the following ten years, under the general direction of this board acting through an executive called the state forester a very ambitious program was initiated. The laws relating to forest fires were improved upon during each session of the legislature and plans for a comprehensive forest reserve were started. Plans were also initiated in a small way for a fundamental regulation by the state of the cutting of merchantable timber on privately owned lands. In the course of these activities the board, through legislative sanction for

the most part initiated by the board or its executive officer, came into virtual control of a considerable acreage of drainage and normal school trust fund lands and purchases of over 150,000 acres of land for forest reserve purposes were made in Vilas and adjoining counties. As state lands they were exempt from taxation and while the people of the effected region were inclined to look on this project as a beneficial thing, they later on became convinced that it was harmful, particularly in a local way, and chiefly because of the tax exemption for state lands which were held for forest reserve purposes in large acreages in organized towns, and a very vigorous and well directed hostility appeared. This culminated in various hearings before the legislature and legislative committees during 1913, and in 1914 a friendly suit before the Supreme Court was commenced, and decision was rendered in 1915, the result of which was that the forestry plan as arranged by the board and the state forester was thrown into the discard as illegal, the court declaring among other items that many of the acts of the board were contrary to the constitution of the state in fundamental particulars. Forestry progress as a state activity came to a standstill and during the same year the state board of forestry was merged, with several other departments, into the present conservation commission. However, the laws pertaining to fire protection and work for the enhancement of the value of the state lands which had been purchased and which still exist as state property were left unimpaired and the conservation commission, in conjunction with the land commission, still carry on these activities as directed by the legislature, but the work of further acquisition of land for forest reserve purposes and the comprehensive policy for the growth of timber directly by the state were stopped.

Simultaneously with the above outlined development of plans for forest conservation, there also occurred a crystallization of opinion that the state should retain control of some of the areas of scenic attractiveness for park purposes. The first effort along this line was in 1878, when the legislature created what was then known as the state park, an area of about 50,000 acres in what was then northern Lincoln County and what is now parts of Iron, Vilas and Oneida Counties. Whether the real motive prompting the setting aside of state lands for this purpose was a love of parks and scenic values or whether it was to hold back the sale of heavily timbered lands which were going pretty fast and pretty cheap at that time is not precisely known, but it was a fact that these lands were set aside under the name of a state

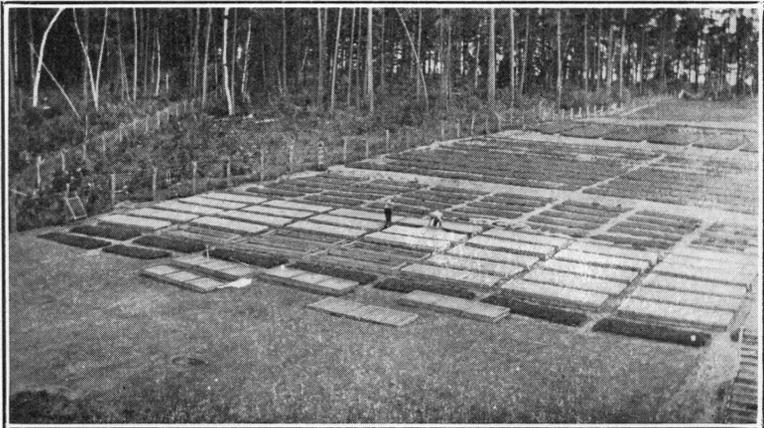
park in a region abounding in lakes and streams and one that could well make a splendid park area. This effort from the standpoint of park development, however, was doomed to defeat. The state park lands were held intact for nineteen years, when through legislative action they were thrown on the market in 1897 and for the most part sold to lumber companies, and the cutting of the timber followed. It is significant to note that the area subsequently purchased by the state for its forest reserve was in the same region and included some of the same land that was in the original state park.

The state park idea, irrespective of the above mentioned action of the legislature, was still being thought of however, for in 1895 a law was passed authorizing the Governor to arrange to acquire 250 acres in what is now known as the Interstate Park. Under this law three commissioners were appointed to examine the lands and determine the values of this area for park purposes. In 1898 a law was passed appropriating \$6500 for the purchase of lands for the Interstate Park. This was done and the Interstate Park became the first of the present day system of state parks in this state. In 1903 additional legislation provided for the appointment of an unsalaried commission of three members to investigate the advisability of establishing a state park about Devils Lake and in 1905 similar legislation provided for the investigation of the Dells of the Wisconsin for park purposes and also provided for \$10,000 for further acquisition of lands in the Interstate Park. In 1907 new legislation provided for the establishment of a state park board and this board was charged further with the duty of examining lands in Door County and reporting as to the advisability of purchasing an area in this part of the state for a state park. Further, the board was to investigate and consider the desirability of securing and preserving all the points of historical interest and natural beauty for park purposes in the state. In 1909 the state park board made its report, which included a study of the situation by John Nolan, landscape architect of Cambridge, Mass. This report highly praises the Dells region and stated it was available at the time the Interstate Park was established and was much more desirable. In fact, it gave first place to the Dells, but could not recommend immediate action because the result of the water power development to the area as a park area could not then be foreseen. The acquisition of the Devils Lake region and a park in Door County and at Wyalusing at the junction of the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers was recommended. These four

sites were subsequently acquired through purchase during 1909 and 1915 inclusive, at which time the state park board was abolished and its activities transferred to the present conservation commission. Through gift and purchase on the part of the state the state park areas have continued to increase until they now number nine areas in various portions of the state.

The state park system is now on a permanent basis. All told these areas are giving good service to the people of the state and also act as little attractive spots to welcome the tourist or visitor to Wisconsin. They include for the most part only those areas having outstanding scenic value, which is state wide in character, and it should be the aim of all concerned to limit the state parks to only such areas, for once the state comes into possession of areas of secondary importance for park areas there is no limit to the demands that may be made by localities for the state to purchase land for park purposes, when by all logic and fairness such areas are local in character and should be taken care of by counties or municipalities. The really suitable areas for state park purposes are very limited in number and should only include places of outstanding or unique state wide significance.

While the history of forest exploitation and conservation is one almost exclusively of exploitation so far, it is becoming more and more apparent that the constructive side must be considered in an increasing way as the years go by. The history of the state's efforts to date is not particularly



A corner in the nursery at Trout Lake, Wisconsin. State operated—Northern State Park.

encouraging, mainly on account of the sharp set back received in the Supreme Court's decision in the forestry case. These constitutional handicaps still remain, and it will be many years before they can be entirely overcome. On the other hand, the fact remains that from three to five millions of acres of land in the state can be productive only through the raising of timber crops. The taxes levied against these lands annually will eventually aggregate more than the lands are worth, unless steps are taken to make the lands productive at least to the extent of yielding annually a sufficient revenue to pay the taxes. The general increasing acreage of cut-over lands in conjunction with this tax problem will compel land owners for their own protection to grow timber or lose the property. It should be the aim of the state to encourage the interest of private land owners in forestry through providing an adequate protection of forest lands against fire and through a plan of taxation that will be fair and equitable for a forest producing property. Located as Wisconsin is to Chicago and the great lumber producing sections of the central United States, it seems reasonable to assume that the increasing interest in forest replacement will eventually result in the state becoming a comparatively large producer of second growth forest products.



Slope denuded of forest growth.