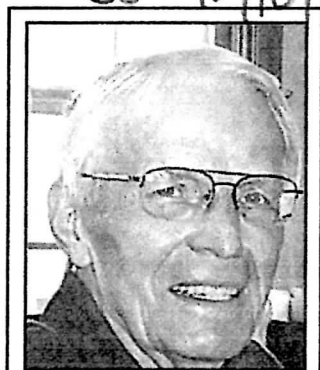


Washburn during the great depression: Farming To forestry-9

CS 12/16/10

As efforts for agricultural settlement of the cutover faded in the 1920s, in fact turned from encouraging to discouraging settlement, interest in state land forest programs for the cutover was revived. A Wisconsin Supreme Court decision in 1915 declared that the program to reforest state lands denuded by lumbering unconstitutional, all but eliminating the program. In 1915, F. B. Moody, a forester from Maine, was appointed state forester. Competent, energetic and politically tactful, he carried on the work of the state forestry division within the restrictions imposed by the Supreme Court decision. Unfortunately, he died prematurely and the state forestry program languished once again. In 1925 voters approved a constitution amendment that allowed the state to appropriate money for forestry purposes. The legislature then approved three forestry laws that provided the legal framework for reconstruction of the cutover through forestry and recreation programs, undertaken by state and county governments. The amendment and the laws were approved almost without opposition, which had been mostly silenced by the failure of agricultural settlement and the desperate plight of the governments and people of the northern counties.

The reorientation of the approach to the revival of the cutover lands from agriculture to forestry, which



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began in the final years of the 1920s, continued along two lines in the 1930s: private forest crop land, and county and national forests. Under the forest crop law approved by the legislature in 1927, an owner of 160 acres or more (reduced to 40 acres in 1929) that was suitable for forestry practices would be exempt from property taxes on the land, except for an annual fee of ten cents an acre. By 1932, 291,247 acres had been entered under the law, although this total was later substantially reduced by cancellations and withdrawals. During the 1930s thousands of acres of cutover land in the northern section of the state were designated as county or national forests. In 1931 four county forests were established in Bayfield County, totaling 117,920 acres. By November 1938, 124,560 acres had been designated as county forests.

In 1929 the National Forest Reservation Commission approved 43,365 acres

for inclusion in the Moquah National Forest Unit, consisting of cutover and burnt-over land, located principally in the Town of Washburn. In the following years several thousand acres were added to the unit, extending it south into parts of the Towns of Delta, Drummond, Grandview, and Namekogan, amounting to 111,434 acres by January 1933. The following March the Moquah unit became part of the Nicolet National Forest, created by a presidential proclamation by President Herbert C. Hoover. The new national forest was dedicated in an elaborate ceremony on June 11 1933, at Park Falls. In early December 1933 the Nicolet National Forest was divided into two forests, one with that name with headquarters in Rhinelander and the second named the Chequamegon National Forest, which included the Moquah unit, plus units in Ashland, Sawyer, and Price Counties, with headquarter in Park Falls.

By the spring of 1936 improvements in the Moquah and Drummond units of the Chequamegon National Forest (total of 315,114 acres) indicated that the objectives of the reserve were well on the way to achievement: six public campgrounds had been established, seven fire towers erected, 339 miles of roads and firebreaks constructed, fire hazards reduced, timber stands improved and millions of seedlings planted, millions of fish of different species

released, rodent control implemented, and many other steps taken to improve and protect the environment as well as make it socially and economically productive. Much of this improvement work was done by men from eight CCC camps in the county with contributions from men working in WPA and other work relief programs.

In 1935 and 1936 state and federal forestry buildings were erected in Washburn, the state building on the northeast corner of Second Avenue East and Bayfield Street and the federal building on the northeast corner of First Avenue East and Bayfield Street. Much of construction work for these buildings was done by men on WPA work relief. The buildings were jointly dedicated in a ceremony, held in the Du Pont club gymnasium, attended by several hundred people including Governor Philip F. La Follette. The Times foresaw in the construction of the forestry headquarters, a new future for Washburn, declaring that if all of the vacant lots in the city were planted with pine seedlings, "In one short generation we would have a city in a forest, a forest in the city. Washburn would be a unique community—the 'Reforestation City.'" But this vision of Washburn as "Reforestation City" went the way of the "Petunia City" fantasy.