

Conservation Progress in Indiana to 1955

STEPHEN S. VISHER, Indiana University

Although immediately following President Theodore Roosevelt's famous "Conference of Governors" on conservation in 1908 several papers were presented before the Academy on conservation, only one has been given since. However, significant progress has been made in the wiser use of Indiana's resources. Much land formerly too wet for farming has been drained; much cut-over or wooded land has been converted into cropland by clearing; damage done by floods has been reduced by tiling, ditching, or by the construction of levees. More than 100 miles of levees have been constructed recently. The erection of hundreds of dams creating reservoirs has retarded runoff. Notable progress has been made in the more efficient use of our petroleum, natural gas and coal resources. Recovery of coal has been greatly augmented by open-cut or strip mining. Recreation-wise, the establishment of numerous state parks and state forest and the construction of artificial lakes have been important. Forest fires have been reduced by the help of numerous lookout towers and much fire-fighting equipment. Numerous small areas have been reforested. A new mineral resource (gypsum) has been discovered and much is now being mined. Costly efforts have been made to improve fishing and hunting, and recently the fishing season has been lengthened, and a brief open season permitted for deer hunting. The recreational and other resources of the several parts of the state have been made more readily available by the construction of better roads and additional bridges.

More effective use of the cropland has followed more widespread crop rotation and the use of much more fertilizer, about 100 times as much in 1955 as in 1909. Soybeans and hybrid corns have been introduced with conspicuous success, and a better adjustment of crops to soil types and climate has been developed. A large percentage of the cropland has been benefitted by the addition of pulverized limestone, to sweeten the soil. There have also been notable improvements in the livestock and in their care. The use of tractors has made possible a quicker planting and harvesting, thus countering some of the ill effects of wet spells.

The net result of the foregoing improvements is that Indiana produces more agricultural and mineral wealth than it did a half century ago, and has a greater water supply, better forests, more game, far better outdoor recreational facilities. In brief, it is a better state in which to live and work.

Numerous people have contributed to the progress Indiana has made in conservation. To mention only persons who have also been active in the Academy since 1908: Stanley Coulter and Charles Deam did considerable to improve the forests. Extensive fish studies were made by Will Scott and William E. Ricker, and studies of other wild life by Frank N. Wallace, J. J. Davis, and H. H. Michaud. Water problems

have been studied especially by C. M. Beckert. Efforts to increase the usefulness of soils were made by T. M. Bushnell, George Scarseth and R. M. Kriebel. State geologists W. S. Blatchley, W. N. Logan and C. R. Deiss have contributed as to minerals. To Col. Richard Lieber goes much credit as to the state parks.

Although significant progress has been made towards the better use of Indiana's resources, much remains to be done. A recent official survey reveals that more than one-tenth of Indiana's land has been severely damaged by soil erosion and another 30 percent has lost between 25 and 75 percent of its topsoil. Much sloping land continues to be mishandled.

The increased runoff stimulated by deforestation, land drainage and soil erosion has resulted in the failure of many springs and shallow wells.

The greatly increasing demand for water partly incidental to industrialization and the great growth in population makes it highly desirable that steps be taken to reduce the rainfall which now runs away. The damage done by floods is increasing and calls for wiser use of land subject to flooding. As to lumber, Indiana, originally nearly all forested, now produces only a small share of its lumber, and makes relatively poor use, experts report, of its woodland.