

History of the Civilian Conservation Corps

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Twenty-five years have passed since the Civilian Conservation Corps was initiated. Today it is almost forgotten even though the roads, trails, buildings and lakes, constructed by the C.C.C. are being used in forests, parks and game preserves. There are comparatively few people, other than those who had an active part in the program, who realize the many contributions made to forestry and conservation.

The events of World War II completely overshadowed the work of the C.C.C. and comparatively little has been written about its activities.

The Act establishing the C.C.C. was passed and signed by President F. D. Roosevelt on March 31, 1933. Although it was primarily a work program, an emergency measure to provide employment to young men, nevertheless emphasis was placed on conservation work. Federal agencies in charge of the program were Agriculture, War, Labor and Interior and in 1936 the Federal Security Agency. The plans provided for 200-man work camps with the War Department responsible for housing of men and camp operation. The conservation work program of the camps was the responsibility of the U. S. Forest Service. They shared the work program with the States.

Political patronage entered the C.C.C. program. One had to be on the "Friant List" and approved by "State patronage" in order to secure some of the non-technical jobs. However, in the technical field the U. S. Forest Service insisted that technically trained men be employed for top positions. This policy was generally followed and political interference was reduced to a minimum.

In Indiana, R. F. Wilcox provided leadership during the establishment and early years of the C.C.C. and Conservation Director Virgil Simmons was an ardent supporter of the programs.

Unemployed men 18 to 25 years of age were recruited for the camps but later the age requirement was changed to 17 to 23 years. The men were paid \$30 per month of which \$25 went to dependents.

During the period of its existence from March 31, 1933 to June 30, 1943 a total of three million men participated in its activities. At its peak there were 2652 camps with 520,000 men engaged in the work program. There were 150 major work projects covering the areas of Forestry, Soil Conservation, Wildlife, Recreation, Flood Control, Range, Reclamation and Drainage.

The C.C.C. was nationwide in its scope and the program carried out in Indiana was much like that of other states. Consequently a summary of what took place in Indiana will illustrate the impact of the C.C.C. on forestry and conservation.

Following the election of F. D. Roosevelt as President, in November, 1932, there was some publicity given to measures that were to be used

to provide employment. However, no specific action was taken until April, 1933 when the State Foresters were asked to attend a meeting in Washington, D. C.¹ Indiana was represented by R. F. Wilcox, State Forester. At this meeting Rexford Tugwell, the president's spokesman, briefly outlined the Civilian Conservation Corps organization. The State Foresters were told that the program was to begin at once; that each was to submit plans for his respective State; that the U. S. Forest Service was in charge of the work program to be shared with the cooperating States. This all came as a complete surprise to the foresters. However, with the assistance of Fred Morrill of the U. S. Forest Service, tentative plans were drawn for the establishment of work camps. Wilcox requested that 33 camps be set up in Indiana. Approval of this action was given by Governor Paul V. McNutt and Conservation Director Virgil Simmons.

One unusual move was made by R. F. Wilcox when he contracted to buy all the available black locust seed. This action resulted in his obtaining 32,000 pounds of seed, all the available supply, both in the United States and Europe. This supply of seed was shared with agencies in other States where black locust was used for planting.

The first conservation work camps to be established in Indiana were on the Clark and Morgan Monroe State Forests. Before the close of 1933 there were 19 camps in operation, the peak being reached in 1935 when 56 camps were operating. There were forest, park, soil erosion, game preserve and drainage camps in Indiana. There was considerable controversy over the establishment of drainage camps and many conservationists were opposed to their operation.

The work of the Civilian Conservation Corps was done on both public and privately owned lands. The major fields of activity were protection of forests, reforestation, woodland improvement, construction of buildings, roads, trails, recreational facilities, ponds and lakes.

As the program progressed changes in organization took place. At first, all of the camps were under the supervision of the State, but in 1935 the Soil Erosion camps were given to the Soil Conservation Service. With the establishment of the Hoosier Purchase Unit, U. S. Forest Service camps were set up. The number of camps varied from year to year and as the national preparedness program developed, and as business activity increased, the number of men available for camps declined. By 1940 some camps were operating with limited manpower while others were closed. Soon after World War II began most of the camps were closed, while some were used as prisoner of war or conscientious objector camps. Facilities provided by the C.C.C. were also used for war training purposes. The official termination of the C.C.C. took place on June 30, 1943.

The direct contributions of the C.C.C. program are as follows:

1. It gave financial aid to young men.
2. It provided job training for many young men.
3. It stimulated widespread public interest in conservation of forests, soil, water and wildlife.

¹ From personal conversation with R. F. Wilcox.

4. It provided camp operation experience for Army reserve officers.
5. It provided positions for foresters and other technically trained men.
6. A large number of worthwhile work projects were completed.

Indirect contributions or by-products were: the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service; purchase of 7 million acres of non-agricultural land by the U. S. Forest Service, one new purchase unit being the Hoosier National Forest. As a result of camp locations the following new State Forests were established: Green-Sullivan, Francis Slocum, Ferdinand, Pike, Salamonie, and Scales Lake.

The effect of the C.C.C. on forestry activities can best be illustrated by an example.

Reforestation in Indiana was progressing slowly until the advent of the C.C.C. Forest tree nursery facilities expanded rapidly in order to provide planting stock for use by the C.C.C. A large supply of black locust seed was available and so millions of seedlings were soon available for field planting.

Considered to be an all purpose tree, black locust seedlings were planted on every site from severely eroded to good sites. Seedlings were planted during all seasons of the year. Tests were made on site preparation, methods of planting, spacing of trees, grades of planting stock, fertilization and cultural practices. Consequently thousands of acres on which millions of seedlings were planted provided large scale tests of the suitability of black locust for reforestation.

It was demonstrated that black locust was not an all purpose tree, that its best growth occurred on good sites and that it did help control soil erosion. Even though some plantings failed, the experience gained has been carried over into today's reforestation practice. Under ordinary conditions no such widespread testing of a species would have been done.

Other species were also widely planted and their place in present day reforestation came directly as a result of plantings made by the C.C.C. Without the extensive application of principles and practices in use during the period of the C.C.C., reforestation would not be occupying the place that it does today.

A history of science would not be complete without recording that the training of many young men of "one depressed generation" places the Civilian Conservation Corps as the greatest single movement that has stimulated and influenced forestry and conservation practices, education and research.

References

1. DANA, S. T. 1956. Forest and Range Policy—Its Development in the United States. 455 pp. New York.
2. INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION. 1933. 15th Annual Report—Reprint from Yearbook.
3. INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION. 1935. 17th Annual Report—Reprint from Yearbook.