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STATE PARKS OF IOWA

Dr. L. H. Pammel, Chairman State Conservation Board.

Parks are being needed in every state. The time has arrived when every class of population is demanding recreation in the out-of-doors. Even the agriculturist is no longer content to leave all the joys and experiences of recreational areas, and all the value of scientifically interesting bits of country, to his city cousin. Hence, individual states all over the country are making provisions to meet this demand. Their efforts are particularly valuable, if for nothing else than that they have brought forth two very interesting facts: First, that there exists a demand for recreational areas and opportunity for enjoying beauty spots of Nature which has not been fully appreciated or comprehended until recently; and, secondly, that it is surprising what a multitude of such areas exist within the reach of every man if they be but sought out and made known.

Although rather young in her efforts toward establishing a system of State Parks, Iowa has made rapid progress, and because of the whole-hearted, unselfish endeavors of those into whose hands this new movement has been placed, she has become one of the leaders.

In a great agricultural state like Iowa, the problems confronting such a body of men are many. Under present conditions of land ownership all available land for farms and pastures has been taken up and title established thereto. There are no places to which the farmer and other rural people can go without trespassing.

Therefore, to make it possible for everyone to enjoy the great out-of-doors, to help lift the burdens from the farmer and the rural people, the State of Iowa has adopted a program of acquiring state parks. The endeavor will be to make these accessible by highways leading from all directions to them, and thus meet one of the great present needs of Iowa's citizens. In this movement the State Fish and Game Department and the Iowa Highway Commission are working in co-operation with the Iowa State Board of Conservation.

Mr. Harlan, Secretary of the State Board of Conservation has said, in this connection: "In Iowa it is but a short spin from prairie lands to fairy lands. Even with moderate roads one can ride from Des Moines in an automobile through certain settlements which resemble parts of the heart of Europe, and others of aboriginal Iowa nature. You can see a natural bridge rivaling that of Virginia; caves of equal scientific interest with that of Kentucky; hills, valleys, plants and fossils the glaciers
left untouched, grottoes in which ice forms while the sun wilts
the corn; lakes rimmed with boulders man cannot move."

There is surely material a plenty here from which to build
a magnificent system of parks.

Iowa is situated between two great rivers: the Mississippi
on the east and the Missouri on the west. Its principal streams,
the Des Moines, Cedar, Oneota, Iowa, Wapsipinicon flowing in
a southeasterly direction, and the Little Sioux, Floyd, Boyer and
Nishnabotna flowing in a southwesterly direction, shape the
topography of the State and in a measure determine the agri-
cultural pursuits.
Moreover, the State had three important ice invasions: the Kansan, which covered a large part of the State; the Iowan covering northeastern Iowa, and the Wisconsin, entering in Wood county, extending southwesterly from Osceola county on the west, and also southeasterly terminating near Des Moines in Polk county. The action of these ice invasions in cutting down and levelling the country has made Iowa a great agricultural state with narrow fertile valleys, rolling prairies and the level stretches of former lake beds, with a fertile soil capable of sustaining a far greater population than it does at present.

Iowa is, therefore, essentially an agricultural state, for more than ninety per cent of even the untiillible land can be used for pasture purposes. It is for this reason that the fringe of timber on the streams and lakes has largely been removed. All of the land in Iowa has been taken up and fenced. The State only owns the land in the meandering lake beds, and larger streams, except the Des Moines, where the lower part was declared navigable and hence became the property of the National Government.

It was no longer possible for persons to take an outing in the woods without trespassing. So a movement was started some twenty-five years ago by Dr. Thomas MacBride, of Iowa City, and others, to have some of the scenic and historic places in Iowa dedicated to the use of the public. Some years ago the Iowa legislature passed a comprehensive drainage law permitting the draining of swamps and lakes. Many of the seventy or more lakes, some quite shallow, were in the process of being drained. In some cases persons wilfully enlarged the natural outlets so that these little lakes soon became swamps and then, under this act, drainage petitions were started. Sometimes there were vigorous protests to the draining of these lakes. In some cases public spirited citizens, as in the case of Medium Lake near Emmetsburg, started to dredge these shallow lakes instead of draining them, thus making them beautiful sheets of water.

To stop this wholesale drainage of Iowa's lakes, the State asked the Highway Commission to make a survey and report to the legislature. A comprehensive survey was made, and it is to the great credit of the Iowa legislature that they accepted and approved the findings of the Highway Commission and the drainage of lakes was stopped.

A third constructive policy of the State was inaugurated during the thirty-seventh general assembly, when the chairman of the Fish and Game Committee introduced a conservation bill creating a Board of Conservation, and creating state parks, and appropriating $50,000 annually out of fees obtained from the license of hunters in the following words: "The State
Board of Conservation, by and with the written consent of the Executive Council, is hereby authorized to establish public parks in any county of the State, upon the shores of lakes, streams or other waters of the State, or at any other places which they have by reason of their location become historic or which are of scientific interest, or by reason of their natural scenic beauty or location become adapted therefore and said Board of Conservation under the supervision of said Executive Council, is hereby authorized to improve and beautify such parks.

Under this act the Board had the right to acquire land by condemnation proceedings. This measure had the active support of many friends in the Senate and House and passed without difficulty. During the fall of 1918 Governor Harding and the Executive Council who were greatly interested in this park movement appointed Hon. Joseph Kelso of Bellevue, J. F. Ford of Ft. Dodge, and L. H. Pammel of Ames, members of this Board, Mr. E. R. Harlan of the State Historical Department being an ex-officio member.

This Board, as one of its first steps, recommended the purchase of an area in Delaware county, locally known as the Devil's Backbone. It embraces a part of the scenic Maquoketa river. There are few more picturesque places in the State. There, are to be seen high limestone cliffs, a few dozen remnants of white pine some two hundred years old, fine springs of clear water, a clear, running brook in which brook trout are common and which is one of the few trout streams in Iowa. There are some 1,200 acres in this tract.

The Board recommended further the purchase of another area of 1,123 acres in Van Buren county, in what is known as the Horseshoe Bend of the Des Moines River. It contains a large number of interesting plants, and, although the wild life of the region has been greatly diminished, there are still left some wild partridges. This beautiful bird has become well nigh extinct in Iowa. The citizens of Keosauqua, many of them farmers, contributed $6,400.00 toward the purchase of this area, and, furthermore, the farmers for a mile beyond the boundary of the park voluntarily gave the State the right to make of the adjoining area a sanctuary of wild life. In the same county the citizens of Farmington and vicinity purchased a 100 acre tract for park purposes. This tract contains a lotus bed of some 40 acres while the surrounding hills are covered with fine oaks, hickories, maples, elms, basswood and ironwood. Two nature-loving women of Davenport, Clara and Emma Brandt, who owned a fine tract for park purposes in Muscatine county, donated to the State some 57 acres. The citizens of the surrounding country,
Davenport and Muscatine, expect to raise a considerable sum of money to be turned over to the State so that the area can be increased, with the aid of the State, to nearly 250 acres.

Limestone Rocks—McGregor, Iowa, National Park Region.

There are now more than 150 applications for state parks on file with the Board. These include such areas as Cedar Bluffs on the Des Moines River in Mahaska county, Red Rock in Marion county, the Palisades in Linn county, the Ledges in Boone county, Wild Cat Dean and Woodman’s Hollow in Webster county, the Devil’s Backbone in Madison county, the caves and
natural bridges in Jackson county, the ice cave near Decorah, the Yellow river region in Allamakee county, Oakland Mills in Henry county, Steamboat Rock and Idle Wild in Hardin county, Happy Hollow in Fremont county, Falling Springs in Fayette county, Pilot Mount in Winnemago county and Oakland in Pottawattamie county. In addition to these there are petitions for lake parks from nearly all of the lakes: Spirit Lake, Okoboji, Rice, Eagle, Iowa, Swan and Twin Lakes in Calhoun county, Wall Lake and Twin Sister Lakes in Wright county, Medium lake near Emmetsburg, Silver Lake, etc.

The park movement is not entirely a city movement. The farmers of the respective areas are greatly interested and in many cases, as in Boone, Calhoun, Henry, Muscatine and Van Buren counties, have shown their interests by offering to buy some of the land for the State. The farmers realize, more than anyone, that the monotony of their daily labors must be combined with recreation. The farmer, too, is liberal in his donations.

It is the plan of the Board to establish three kinds of parks; first, state parks, larger areas accessible by good highways, which will become regional parks and will be so located that they will supply the needs of several counties. In the case of the Devil's Backbone in Delaware county, 125,000 people live within fifty miles of this park. Although not advertised by the Board, 10,000 people visited the park last summer, coming by auto, on foot and with teams. This shows a local interest in the park and that it serves the farming community. Such regional parks will no doubt be established in Linn, Hardin, Boone, Henry, Jackson, Webster, Dubuque, Madison, Woodbury, Fremont, Mills, Marion, Lee, Hardin, Keokuk, Davis, Muscatine, Jones, Harrison and other counties where there is something unusual from a standpoint of science, history and recreation.

The second type of park will be the lake park. The policy of the state is to preserve the lakes. Except for a small tract of land on East Okoboji the state owns no land where people can have free access to the lakes. The lakes, as far as possible, will be skirted with highways and enough land will be acquired so that future generations can use the waters belonging to the state unmolested.

The third type of park is the highway park. These will be of smaller extent, twenty-five to thirty-five acres, usually land of not much value for agricultural purposes, ideal, however, for park purposes, and will supply the communities with places for wholesome recreation. At Oakland some fifteen acres are offered to the state, provided the state will increase the area to twenty-seven acres. Some 50,000 people at various times during the past summer visited this wooded park. These parks are
community enterprises and the State has a right to ask that the local community shall interest itself in this undertaking as the people of Oakland have. These community parks will allow free camping for the people who do not wish to go to the hotel. Good healthful sport, like baseball, football, etc., will be permitted. Good water and other conveniences will also be provided. It is hoped that they will encourage the outdoor life.

There may be established a fourth kind of park—prairie parks. To the pioneer the wild flowers of Iowa were a solace. In no place in the world could there be found a greater profusion of asters, goldenrods, blazing star, blue stem and blue joint than on the prairies of Iowa. Some of these prairies should be preserved to let future generations know what the prairies of Iowa were like in all their glory.

The park movement has had the active support of the Iowa legislature and the Executive Council, including Governor Hard ing, who have more than once in public addresses made a strong plea for state parks. Public sentiment in the state favors a vigorous and large program with the feeling that places for recreation, historic and scientific value must be obtained before the advance of civilization has removed the landmarks in our history or destroyed areas of great scientific value. The feeling prevails that future generations are entitled to the heritage given to us and that we must preserve it.

With this comprehensive program ahead, Iowa is giving to her people a valuable demonstration of an asset which heretofore has been generally overlooked by the busy masses of her citizens. Iowa will not have to travel outside her own borders to enjoy nature as lovely as can be found anywhere in the world.