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G. B. MacDonald
Iowa State College

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The Beginning of a National and State Forestry Program in Iowa

By PROF. G. B. MacDONALD
Head of Forestry Dept. Iowa State College

PROBABLY one of the most important problems which Iowa is facing today relates to adjustments in land use. For many years, conservationists have anticipated the time when a real start would be made in the public acquisition of forest lands which are not best adapted to agricultural use. Apparently this time arrived when the National Forest Reservations Commission approved, on January 21, 1935, purchase units with a gross area of 829,000 acres for national forests in Iowa.

Perhaps a brief summary of the forest situation in Iowa might be of interest in connection with the program of acquiring both federal and state forests. The state authorities have recently had an opportunity to make a rather close check on the original land surveys of Iowa, which began over 100 years ago. It is interesting to note that in this first survey of Iowa, the state then had a total area of 6,681,000 acres of land which were classed as forests. In the extreme northeastern part of the state, some of the counties had 90 percent of the original area in native timber stands, and the southeastern portion, in some cases, as high as 70 to 75 percent covered with trees. In general, the percentage of timber gradually decreased toward the northwest corner of the state.

During the past 100 years the timber area has been constantly reduced in order to give way to agricultural production. This process has been continuing for several generations until now the stand of native timber has been reduced to such an extent as to cause alarm, even to the casual observer.

The rapid removal of native timber was accentuated during the war period, when every possible acre of land was pressed into the production of agricultural crops. At this time many pieces of timber land too rough for ordinary cultivation or with soil too thin for good croppings were brought into service. This resulted in a tremendous decrease in native timber acreage in the state. The situation was further aggravated during the de-
pression. Many landowners who carried heavy mortgages have lost their lands through foreclosure. The timber remaining was turned into cash where possible before foreclosure. This has resulted in a sad depletion of timber stands on thousands of acres over Iowa.

At the present time Iowa is faced with a serious land adjustment problem and this will not be handled in a satisfactory way without the assistance of the state or federal government in setting aside relatively extensive areas for national or state forest use. The situation is especially acute in southern Iowa, where the soils are particularly susceptible to serious soil erosion when the original vegetative cover is removed. At the present time thousands of acres of the poorer types of soil which have been pressed into agricultural use have been depleted of soil fertility or have been eroded to the point where further satisfactory revenue from an agricultural standpoint is quite problematical. In many cases the owners of these depleted lands have been reduced to such circumstances as to require county, state or federal aid. This situation has already had a decided influence on the population. Many people have already moved to other more productive areas.

A study of tax delinquency for the state shows this to be extremely severe in the portions of southern Iowa which have suffered most from depletion of soil fertility and soil erosion. In some townships delinquency has nearly reached the 50 percent figure.

The above merely indicates that the time has come when drastic changes in land use must be undertaken. This does not
mean that any large part of the total area will be taken over for state or federal forest use, or even for permanent grazing lands. The better soils should still be maintained for agricultural purposes through the application of sane methods of agricultural cropping which will not only renew the fertility of the soil, but also prevent its loss through erosion. This will be accomplished in part through liming the soil and planting leguminous crops.

Other areas which are of questionable use for cultivated crops will be put into either public or private forage areas where the surface vegetative cover will not be broken. The poorer soils and steeper slopes will be taken over for the production of either private or public forest crops, and in this way these kinds of soils be put to their best use.

The State of Iowa was particularly fortunate at the beginning of the CWA program in the fall of 1933 in being able to acquire extensive funds for a so-called “Forest and Waste Land Survey.” In a few months time about two-thirds of the state was covered in a rather extensive survey. This included tabulation of data on timber lands, as well as other areas most suitable for forest use. This survey has been more recently continued as a part of the State Planning Board program.

During the fall of 1934 it became possible for the state to recommend, through the Milwaukee office of the U. S. Forest Service, a proposal for the gradual acquisition of approximately two million acres of national forest lands for the state. An examination of the most promising areas was made by the federal forestry officials and the following gross acreages recommended for an immediate acquisition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forest Purchase Units</th>
<th>Acreages</th>
<th>Counties Affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keosauqua</td>
<td>126,080</td>
<td>Van Buren, Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chequest</td>
<td>224,040</td>
<td>Appanoose, Van Buren, Davis, Monroe, Wapello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chariton</td>
<td>151,520</td>
<td>Appanoose, Marion, Monroe, Lucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand River</td>
<td>307,360</td>
<td>Clarke, Lucas, Decatur, Union, Ringgold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>829,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>13 Counties</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A report covering these areas, as a beginning for the national forest set-up for Iowa, was submitted to the National Forest Reservations Commission January 21, 1935, and the gross acreage of 829,000 acres was approved for purchase areas. In the preliminary survey it has been estimated that of the gross acreage, probably approximately 572,000 acres will be acquired for national forest use.

It is interesting to note that the beginning of the national forest set-up for Iowa includes the poorer soil areas in the southern
part of the state. Most of these are brushland, eroded and cut-over areas in the rougher sections. Due to the fact that the national forest units occur close to agricultural lands of high value, the purchase price of the national forest lands will probably be higher than the price paid for more extensive forest areas in other states in less highly developed agricultural regions. It is believed, however, that the price at which these areas may be secured will be sufficiently low to justify the purchase of extensive areas.

"A definite change of the land use policy must result."

In carrying out a national forest policy in an agricultural state such as Iowa, it will be necessary to vary the Iowa program somewhat from the national forest procedure in the Western states. Within each of the national forest units will be found good agricultural lands which are to be privately owned. The federal government has no thought of buying the better agricultural lands which can still be used for the production of cultivated crops.

The question of how the counties will be reimbursed for the apparent loss in taxes is a point of interest. In the first place, the lands which are being purchased are mostly tax delinquent and have been in this condition for several years, and secondly, the established policy of the U. S. Forest Service in turning back to the county 25 percent of the gross revenue for schools and 10 percent for taxes will probably, in the long run, produce
a greater return for the county than if these lands were to re-
main in private ownership with a misdirected effort to still
produce agricultural crops.

One of the most interesting angles of the program from the
human rehabilitation standpoint is the Forest Service plan to
allow landowners to retain their homes and a small tract of
land for gardening purposes at the time the poor lands are pur-
chased for national forest use. In this way the landowners will
not be forced to leave their homes unless it is clearly impos-
sible for them to make a living in their present location. The
further plan of making possible several months employment on
the national forest area each year for adjoining landowners will
go a long way toward providing relief for many families in these
localities.

It is refreshing to note that the national forestry officials have
in mind adjusting their land program for Iowa in a way which
will fit the needs of the state. It is their plan to adopt a policy
somewhat different from the old so-called "saw-log" program
for the national forests. Under Iowa conditions, it is proposed
to develop the national forest areas, not only for the production
of valuable crops of timber, but also in such a way as to secure
maximum game and fish production and at the same time pro-
vide in an adequate way for the recreation of the people of the
state. It is also probable that some areas in the national forest
units will be more serviceable for grazing than for other uses
and such areas will probably be handled for this type of de-
development. In general, it appears that with the understanding
of the federal authorities of the Iowa conditions, that the pres-
ent national forest program offers an opportunity for the de-
development of the poorer soil areas of Iowa in a way which will
produce the maximum in results from all standpoints for the
people of the state.

It is the hope of those who have been interested in conser-
vation matters in Iowa for many years that the present national
forestry program is the beginning of a more comprehensive
program of retirement of the poorer land areas of the state for
forest or park use. Already recommendations have been made
to the State Planning Board for four additional national forest
purchase areas, totalling a gross acreage of 916,000 acres, and
it is hoped that federal funds will soon be available for the
purchase of extensive units in the following areas:

A balanced program between national and state forests in
Iowa is desirable. In other words, it is felt that instead of
having all of the rougher, poorer areas in national forests,
that the state should acquire smaller units of state forest
lands to be administered by the State Conservation Com-
mission. Recommendations have already been made to the
"The saw log policy of the Forest Service has been modified—"

Iowa State Planning Board for the acquisition of a gross acreage of 640,000 acres to be administered as state forests. These areas are found in 47 counties of the state. At the present session of the State Legislature a bill has been submitted asking for an appropriation of $500,000 to be used during the next biennium largely for the purchase of state forest and state park areas. If this fund is provided, it is probable that a beginning in state forests, as well as national forests, will be made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Unit</th>
<th>Counties Involved</th>
<th>Gross Acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pottawattamie</td>
<td>Plymouth, Woodbury, Monona, Harrison, Pottawattamie, Mills, Fremont</td>
<td>330,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Shelley</td>
<td>Humboldt, Webster, Boone, Dallas, Polk</td>
<td>119,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Winneshiek, Allamakee, Clayton, Delaware, Dubuque</td>
<td>253,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winneshiek</td>
<td>Muscatine, Johnson, Washington, Louisa, Jefferson, Des Moines, Henry</td>
<td>211,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar River</td>
<td></td>
<td>915,169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note also that the state is making an effort to qualify for federal aid which may be available if present legislation in congress is passed. This legislation provides for the federal government loaning to the various states, funds to be used for the purchase of state forest lands and which is to be returned to the federal government without interest over a long period of years from earnings which may later be secured from these lands. The proposal does not provide for any of the funds to be secured from taxation but rather from the production and sale of products from the proposed forest areas.