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Emergency Conservation on Indian Lands

By J. P. KINNEY

The commercial forests on Indian reservations within the United States cover approximately 6,500,000 acres. Over 5,000,000 additional acres may be classed as woodland because of a growth thereon of pinion, juniper and other non-commercial species. Nearly 40,000,000 acres are classed as being primarily grazing lands. While the amount of forest and grazing areas comprises but a small percentage of the lands of such classification in the nation, such land is of great economic importance and forms a substantial portion of the total area within such States as Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Prior to July 1, 1933, very limited funds had been available for the development and protection of forest and grazing lands on Indian reservations. In fact, for protection from fire, tres-
pass, insects and disease, the amount available in any one year had never exceeded an average of one-half cent per acre and the amount available for all forest and grazing protection, administration and improvement purposes had not exceeded one cent per acre. It was well recognized that such expenditures were entirely inadequate, but urgent efforts to secure larger appropriations of federal funds were unsuccessful.

The Conservation program, as organized by the Roosevelt administration in April, 1933, brought to the Indian Service a golden opportunity to improve Indian lands. Immediately after the approval of the Emergency Conservation Act of March 31, 1933 (48 Stat. 22), the Indian Service took steps to claim a part of the benefits that the Act contemplated. Three months passed before all details for Indian participation in the Conservation plan could be worked out, but immediately after July 1, 1933, thousands of Indians were put at work on physical improvements to forest and range lands on Indian reservations.

Because of the dependent condition of most Indians and the great distress that existed among the members of many tribes due to the economic depression and the drought of the preceding three years, the regulations as to E. C. W. on Indian reservations were greatly liberalized. The age requirement of 18 to 25 years was waived and all Indians, physically fit, who desired to work were enrolled and as many of them placed on active duty at one time as could be accommodated. To meet the relief situation on various reservations enrollees were rotated for periods of ten days, two weeks or a month, and during the first six months as many as 12,000 Indians were on the payrolls at one time.

A large number of foresters, engineers, and other technicians were employed, but to as great an extent as possible Indians were placed in positions of sub-foremen and foremen and were advanced to project managers and other supervisory positions as soon as they had demonstrated their ability to handle large groups of men or perform duties of special responsibility. A special effort was made to train Indians as truck drivers, tractor drivers, grader operators, powder-men, compressor operators and mechanics with a view to fitting them for such work in the commercial world after the E. C. W. program is completed.

During the period from April 1, 1933, to June 30, 1936, over $31,000,000 has been allotted to the Indian Service for E. C. W. activities on Indian lands and it is expected that ap-
proximately $6,500,000 will be received during the period July 1, 1936, to March 31, 1937. All phases of the Conservation Work have been carried out under the direct supervision of the Indian Service, the Army not having assumed responsibility for the operation of camps on Indian reservations. In only a few instances have the enrollees on Indian lands been concentrated in the regulation camps of 200 men each. In many instances camps of from 30 to 75 men have been maintained by the Indian Ser-

Chippewa Indian in tribal costume.

vice, but in other instances the men have established their own camps, often accompanied by their families, and frequently small crews have gone out daily from their regular homes to the work projects. The consent of Director Fechner to these forms of organization has been of great advantage in the accomplishment of effective work results. These advantages were offset by certain disadvantages in particular cases.
UNDER the Emergency Conservation program on Indian reservations there had been completed prior to December 31, 1935, the following projects:

- Truck trails, 4,847 miles.
- Telephone lines, 4,127 miles.
- Fences for stock, 7,850 miles.
- Springs developed and reservoirs built for stock watering purposes, 5,450.
- Forest stand improvement, 590,633 acres.
- Insect pest control, 490,000 acres.
- Rodent control, 9,878,380 acres.

The above classifications include only those phases of the work that have been most extensive. The activities on Indian lands have embraced almost every type of conservation of natural resources, including the protection of game, fish and other wild life. Many streams and some of the larger dams have been stocked with fish, streams have been improved, forest and prairie stocked with pheasants and antelope and on restricted ranges within the Crow Reservation in Montana and the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota small herds of bison have been restored. Extensive planting of forest trees has not been undertaken because of the difficulty of obtaining seedlings and the fact that forest regeneration is generally very satisfactory on Indian forest lands. The existing forest nursery on the Red Lake Reservation in Minnesota has been enlarged and small nurseries established at Lac du Flambeau, Cheyenne River, Rosebud, Rocky Boy, Neah Bay and Yakima Reservations.

DURING the first year especial emphasis was placed upon prevention and soil conservation in Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma, and especially effective results were accomplished on the Mescalero Reservation in New Mexico and on Indian lands in Oklahoma. Subsequently the Soil Conservation Service took over this type of work on the Navajo and Pueblo lands in Arizona and New Mexico and late in 1935 erosion control on the Shoshone Reservation in Wyoming was assumed by the same organization.

The Emergency Conservation Work plan has been of incalculable advantage to the Indians. At a time when they were unable to support themselves adequately on their own lands because of the most severe drought within the memory of the oldest men and when it was impossible for them to obtain outside employment because of the economic depression, they have
been afforded employment on the reservations at a living wage through Conservation activities. The physical assets of the reservations have been greatly improved and the Indians aroused to a realization of the possibilities of economic independence through personal effort. Men and women experienced in Indian administration are not unmindful of the unfavorable tendencies of a program that takes Indians away from their farms or other places of occupation and substitutes a wage economy for one based on individual initiative and responsibility. However, the great majority of the Indians who have been engaged in Conservation Work were practically in a condition of economic inactivity when they were accepted for such work and every practicable precaution has been exercised to overcome the formation of a habit of dependence on the Government for continued support. It is confidently believed that the Conservation program has actually improved greatly the mental and moral outlook of the Indians and advanced them toward the goal of industrial independence. This industrial independence has been the great desideratum in Indian Affairs during the century and a half since the Federal Government has been wrestling with the Indian problem. If Emergency Conservation contributes as materially to such advance as now appears probable, the $37,000,000 allocated to the Indian Service will have been wisely invested from a national standpoint.

These little fellows have a father at work on I. E. C. W. projects.