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Recommended Citation
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Clarifying the Policy of the C. C. C.

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So much has appeared in the public press and elsewhere regarding the CCC that it has seemed to me that an article describing its activities or discussing statistically its accomplishments or future prospects would have little value to the readers of this publication. It may be of more interest if I call attention to some questions which I think those who may have some part in or contact with the project might do well to consider.

Conservation agencies of the United States may be said to have been in the low income brackets until they became relatively affluent under the administration of the second Roosevelt. The Civilian Conservation Corps has supplied resources of labor, equipment and materials that place it in a position comparable to that of an individual suddenly coming into relatively large wealth. It must choose between what is worth while and what is not worth while in the expenditure of funds.

Proper planning on a national scale is essential to wise use of the Corps. Much of the work that was planned when the project was begun has already been accomplished. Probably some has been done that was not important. We cannot proceed on the assumption that wherever there is some work that a state or federal official would like to have done there is a suitable assignment for a work company. We should proceed in the future in a much more plan-wise way than we have in the past.

Conservation agencies having a voice in the expenditures of the resources that will be made available to them by the Civilian Conservation Corps need continuously to consider the following points:

1. That the rehabilitation and training of enrollees is the predominant purpose of the project;
2. That the relative merits of all the lines of conservation work which the Corps will be authorized to undertake must be weighed, and we must have sufficient knowledge of these different kinds of conservation activities on which to base judgment as to priorities;
(3) That plans for the Corps must be national in scope and local interests must not be allowed to prevail.

I shall discuss these considerations briefly in the order mentioned.

Conservationists are as much interested as other people in the training and development of young men, but what will best serve these purposes may sometimes be in conflict with what would be of greatest value in the conservation of national resources. It is easy, under such circumstances, for the conservationist to conclude that what will best serve his interest will also best serve the other one. The project is designed to furnish an opportunity to the under-privileged boy. The better equipped and more industrious of the enrollees are the first to find a place for themselves in the ordinary social and economic lives of the country. It must be recognized that as a general rule, the most troublesome and least valuable employees from the work standpoint are those who most need the benefits of the Corps. Conservation officers recognize these things, but in some cases the desire for accomplishment of their own work projects sets up an opposing interest. That opposing interest finds expression in efforts to have enrollment policies so adjusted as to induct into and retain in the Corps those boys who are most valuable from the work standpoint. It has frequently found expression in disagreement with the policies set up by the President and by the Director to provide for development of enrollees, and in a consequent reluctance energetically to carry out these policies. A complete understanding of and sym-

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pathy with the direct social values of the project and a judicial weighing of these values in contrast with conservation values is, I suggest, a most important consideration for all conservationists who work with or comment on the project.

To succeed in one’s work one must believe in it and fight for it. A forester must believe in forestry, a recreationist in recreation and a wildlife biologist in wildlife. We live in a competitive world and to a reasonable degree one must strive for the success of his own project. The individual’s first interest should properly be in his own project. But if he insists on the execution of his interests to the disadvantage and detriment of the interests of others, then he becomes not an asset in general planning, but a liability. Too frequently, conservationists directly interested in one resource are unsympathetic toward projects of another kind. The wildlifer has sometimes failed to recognize the values of forest production. The forester has sometimes failed to appreciate the place of wild life in land management, etc. Too often such prejudices are due to lack of knowledge of the other project, which might easily be obtained. One of the things demonstrated by four years of operation of the Corps is the need for tolerance and understanding of all lines of conservation activities.

There is no rule by which one may accurately determine the relative advantage of work done in a given community or state against its value to the nation as a whole. We know that future prosperity and well-being of the nation depend on the natural resources which have been the foundation of our advancement. These resources must be preserved and their preservation cannot be left entirely to the initiative and ability of local communities which are in competition with each other. But administrators of the project will be faced with pressure from local, selfish interests who see in it chiefly an opportunity to gain individual or community benefits. The National Chamber of Commerce will no doubt continue to deplore large federal expenditures and the local chambers of commerce will continue to be the most aggressive and effective groups to press for expenditures of federal funds in their communities.

Not infrequently in the administration of the CCC, local conservationists may find themselves in a situation where a great deal of courage will be required if they are to function
as men of broad, national interests rather than of narrow, local interest. They will need to guard against being complaisant because a proposed project would be under their supervision and would therefore add to the prestige of their organizations. There may even be real danger of the Corps engaging on projects of questionable value to conservation unless conservation officials show real ability and courage in such situations.

To repeat the simile of the man with the small, versus the man with the large income: it requires less ability to direct the expenditure of an income which is all needed for essentials than it does to avoid using part of a much larger income in ways that are not the best from the social-economic standpoint. The CCC represents a large resource of labor and materials and its proper use will require greater abilities from natural resource managers.