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REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN
OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PRESERVATION OF
NATURAL CONDITIONS

A. N. WILCOX

The establishment of this permanent committee of the Minnesota Academy of Science was authorized at the annual meeting in 1937. The original committee consisted of W. J. Breckenridge, R. L. Donovan, T. B. Magath, H. E. Stork, Gustav Swanson, and A. N. Wilcox, chairman. In the intervening years the personnel of the committee has undergone a number of changes.

Soon after the establishment of this committee, systematic inquiries were made of persons in all parts of the state, including members of the Academy, county agricultural agents and other agricultural extension workers, and teachers in colleges and high schools concerning the location of tracts of land which ought to be considered for preservation, because of their natural history values, for scientific and educational purposes. These inquiries resulted in the location of about thirty tracts, principally coniferous forest, deciduous forest, and prairie. Most of these were investigated further. In addition, a study was made of the Soil Conservation Service aerial photographs of the southern part of the state where the deciduous forests had been indigenous, in order to locate any large and promising tracts of that type which had not been reported. The most promising areas were then visited by a subcommittee consisting of W. J. Breckenridge, L. M. Gould, C. O. Rosendahl, Gustav Swanson, and A. N. Wilcox.

After these surveys had been made it was decided that the committee might well direct its attention first to three projects: (1) the establishment of a study area in Itasca State Park, (2) the preservation of the Nerstrand Woods in Rice County, and (3) the preservation of Cedar Creek Bog and surrounding area in Anoka and Isanti Counties. The first of these was undertaken because it offered the possibility of some immediate returns in the way of facilities for field studies; the other two, because the areas were threatened with the destruction of their natural history values. It was recognized that there were other areas deserving attention, particularly the Forestville Woods in Fillmore County, King's Bluff in Winona County, and an area of unbroken prairie, but it seemed desirable to concentrate on those with more immediate need or promise.

It was hoped that the establishment of a natural area on land already preserved in Itasca State Park, convenient to the Biological Field Station of the University of Minnesota and to the camping facilities in the Park, might encourage participation in coordinated biological surveys that would increase in attractiveness and value with the passage of time. In 1938 a subcommittee of A. M. Elliott, A. A. Granovsky, J. Manweiler, C. O. Rosendahl, A. C. Voegelé, and

Gustav Swanson, chairman, accordingly selected a suitable area of 1900 acres across the lake from the Biological Field Station and prepared a blueprint map. This was reported in the *Proceedings* for 1939.

The Nerstrand Woods, about ten miles southeast of Northfield, in Rice County, was selected for attention because it was both desirable and threatened. Lying considerably east of the Big Woods, it was probably a relict outpost of the forests which had extended upward along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. At an early date it had been divided into small woodlots which were sold to farmers living on the surrounding prairie. The individual holdings were too small to be fenced and grazed, with the result that the forest floor was remarkably preserved. The timber, principally oak-elm-maple-basswood forest, was about what would be expected from good forest management. A stream with an attractive waterfall flowed through a rather deep valley with limestone outcrops. The proximity of this forest to Carleton College and St. Olaf College at Northfield and the moderate distance to Minneapolis and St. Paul were factors increasing its potential value for scientific purposes. Although the value of this area had long been recognized and its preservation urged, certain portions were already being completely cleared and others were being sold for that purpose.

The possibility of ownership by one or the other of the colleges at Northfield was explored. Efforts were repeated to obtain a state appropriation to preserve the forest as a state park. Although this bill was not passed, sufficient support was created so that much of what was desired was accomplished by other means. Through the passage of a constitutional amendment and an enabling act, a mechanism was provided for the exchange of lands between the State of Minnesota and the Federal Government. The National Forest Reservation Commission then bought 467.55 acres of land in the Nerstrand Woods and transferred ownership to the State in return for other lands. The Nerstrand Woods State Park was then established by a legislative act which provided that a portion of the land included could be used for public recreational purposes, but that a portion must be reserved for forestry or other studies to be carried out with the approval of the Regents of the University of Minnesota.

It should be pointed out that some of the most desirable parts of this forest have not yet been acquired. It is recommended that attention be given to the need of acquiring these tracts and incorporating them as soon as practical into the Nerstrand Woods State Park.

The preservation of Cedar Creek Forest in Anoka and Isanti Counties was important because this was the southern relict outpost nearest to Minneapolis and St. Paul of the Canadian type of forest with its characteristic plant and animal life. Red pine, jack pine, and thick forests of white pine occurred on the hills with tamarack and dense stands of white cedar and black spruce in the swamps.

Deer were plentiful and beavers were active along the creek. Ruffed grouse, spruce grouse, the Canada jay and the arctic three-toed woodpecker were found there. Although fire scars on some of the old pines revealed the invasion of fire many years ago, the presence of large specimens of prostrate junipers attested to the freedom from fire which had been-enjoyed by other portions of the area.

It was concluded that the University of Minnesota would be the best possible custodian of this area. Correspondence begun in March, 1940, with President Guy Stanton Ford led to the drafting of an agreement between the Academy and the University which was concluded on December 11, 1942, while Walter C. Coffey was president.

It was recognized that the area to be preserved should be compact, should have easily defined boundaries, and should be large enough not only to include the different types of vegetation and topography needed to make it the most useful but also to include an adequate range for the wild life and to minimize disturbance and undesirable migration. A size of at least 800 acres and possibly up to 1600 acres was recommended.

Contributions of land and of money for the purchase of land were solicited from a variety of sources. Through the generous contributions of many individuals and one charitable foundation, 320 acres have been purchased by the Academy and deeded to the University. In addition, 130 acres were given directly to the University by individual donors. A total of 450 acres in this forest has thus been preserved.

It is recommended that funds be sought as soon as possible to acquire other tracts as they come on the market, and particularly to acquire 260 acres which have been bought by friends of the Academy to be turned over at cost. It should be emphasized that the regular funds of the Academy have not been used for the purchase of land, for other costs, or for the development of Cedar Creek Forest. All the funds, the real estate, and legal services have been generous contributions, for which the committee tenders its grateful acknowledgement. It is important, however, for the Academy as a whole to complete the fund-raising aspects of this project as soon as possible.

Arrangements for the administration of this area have already been effected as reported by O. T. Walter, chairman of the Academy's advisory committee on the administration of Cedar Creek Forest, and considerable progress has since been made in the development of facilities to aid in the conduct of research work there. It is recommended that the chairman of the Committee on Preservation of Natural Conditions prepare a report on the progress of the Cedar Creek Forest project to be published in the 1950 Proceedings.

A. N. WILCOX, *chairman*
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