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The Iowa State Preserves System: A Progress Report

EDWARD T. CAWLEY¹

Abstract. The Iowa State Preserves System was formed by action of the 61st General Assembly in 1965. It is administered by the State Advisory Board for Preserves. The function of the board is to locate, dedicate, direct management, and protect areas of natural, archeological, historical, geological or scenic value.

To date nine areas have been dedicated: Hayden Prairie, Kalsow Prairie, Pilot Knob State Park, Sheeder Prairie, and White Pine Hollow, as Nature Preserves; Fish Farm Mounds, Turkey River Mounds, and Wittrock Indian Village as Archeological Preserves; and Fort Atkinson as a Historical Preserve. Nine additional areas have been recommended for preserve status. Short-term scientific studies for development of management plans and interpretive signs, have been conducted. A half-time ecologist was hired for 1968-69.

There is urgent need to develop a public awareness of the importance of the Preserves Board in safeguarding Iowa's natural lands, waters, unusual flora, fauna, and geological, archeological, scenic and historical features of scientific or educational values.

The concept of preserving nature for the enjoyment and education of the people was given formal recognition by the dedication of Backbone State Park in Delaware County in 1918 (Crane and Olcott, 1933). From this auspicious beginning the park system grew until by 1933 it encompassed 42 areas called by a variety of names, including park, preserve, and sanctuary (Crane and Olcott, 1933). The Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan (Crane and Olcott, 1933) proposed the concept that both preserves and parks were necessary.

"For several reasons, both of economy and of practical use, the distinction between the state park and the state preserve is considered essential in the plan. The preserve is not a lower classification but rather a *more special one* aimed to accomplish the purpose inherent in saving for public use those areas not needed for crowded recreation and which would be injured by crowds. The state park, then, in addition to serving as a preserve, is intended to fill the demand in all parts of the state for recreation facilities, to be used by hundreds or thousands of people at one time" (Crane and Olcott, 1933).

Seventy preserves were proposed, including "historic points, sites of most unusual scientific interest (geological phenomena, Indian mounds, and rare types of plants), parts of seven outstanding forest tracts. . . ." (Crane and Olcott, 1933) (Fig. 1).

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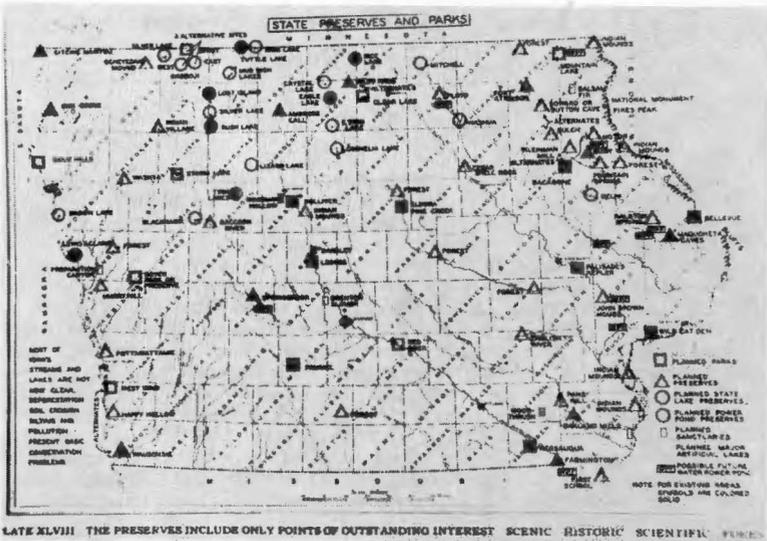


Fig. 1. Parks and preserves recommended in the Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan (from Crane and Olcott, 1933).

While this plan was not adopted in its entirety, many of the recommendations were followed: the acquisition of several prairie preserves, some archeological and historic sites, and White Pine Hollow as a forest preserve. Local pressure was important in many of these projects. The Dubuque County Conservation Society was formed to aid in the acquisition of White Pine Hollow (Baumgartner, 1969), and the Iowa Academy of Science's Conservation Committee was a powerful force in the development of the prairie preserves (Hayden and Doty, 1945; Hayden, 1945; Hayden, 1946).

However, the concept of separation of parks and preserves in regard to utilization and management was lost and the lack of clear definition of terms continued.

“In the use of the several names more or less interchangeably, we see an illustration of the confusion still existing with regard to the classification of sites owned by the states and falling within this general category. . . . The fundamental consideration is that the state has two objectives when it buys an unusually interesting tract. The objectives are first, to *preserve* the character of the site, literally protecting it against any type of damage, and second, to make that tract available to the nature-hungry citizen in such a way that he may see and enjoy the place without injuring it. This double purpose can be accomplished only by closely limit-

ing the artificial development of such areas, and by deliberately arranging to draw the big crowds to those units best suited to handle them, thereby protecting the areas which would be injured for the people's own use by throngs stampeding through the woods and meadows" (Crane and Olcott, 1933).

The truth of this early warning of the dangers of excessive utilization by unwise multiple use became apparent as the population pressure on the outdoor resources increased.

In 1964, Iowa Governor Hughes appointed a Committee on Conservation of Outdoor Resources. The committee was asked to survey the outdoor resource conservation and recreational needs of Iowa to the year 2000 (Governor's Committee on Conservation of Outdoor Resources, 1964). The final report of the Committee (Haugen, 1964) included a number of recommendations for improving resource conservation in Iowa. One of the top-priority recommendations called for legislative action to establish a State Preserves System to be administered by a State Preserves Advisory Board. The bill was introduced by Senators Benda and Kibbie, passed both houses of the 61st General Assembly and is now codified as Chapter 111.B, Code of Iowa, 1966.

STATE PRESERVES SYSTEM

Inclusion in the Preserves System recognizes areas of importance as records of the natural history or historical development of the state, and protects these areas from accidental or intentional modification which would destroy their unique qualities. Any area, State, County, City or private, can be dedicated as a preserve upon the approval of the Preserves Board, with concurrence from the public land-holding agency or private property owner, and the governor. Dedicated preserves receive more protection from exploitation or encroachment from private or public agencies than do other lands. Lands in preserves may not be condemned for other uses without the consent of the Governor, the Conservation Commission, and the Preserves Board, and then only after a finding of imperative and unavoidable necessity. The preserves have been divided into five major categories: Nature Preserves, Archeological Preserves, Historical Preserves, Geological Preserves, and Scenic Preserves.

The Preserves Advisory Board provides a mechanism to locate, dedicate, and set up management plans for the preserves. In addition to these major duties the board is authorized: to make, survey, and maintain registries of possible preserve areas, to promote scientific investigations pertaining to preserve areas, to carry on interpretive programs and publish and disseminate information relating to preserves.

There are seven members on the board. The director of the State Conservation Commission is an *ex officio* member, the other six are selected by the Governor from persons with a demonstrated interest in preservation of natural lands, waters and historical sites. The State Conservation Commission, the conservation committee of the Iowa Academy of Science, and the State Historical Society submit to the Governor a list of possible appointments.

The original board, appointed in August 1965, consisted of Professor Margaret Black, Dr. Edward Cawley, Dr. George Knudson, Dr. Marshall McKusick, Dr. William Peterson and Mr. Robert Russell, with Conservation Director Mr. Everett Speaker automatically serving by virtue of his position. The only change to date has been the replacement of Mr. Speaker by Mr. Fred Priewert, the new director of the Conservation Commission.

ACTIVITIES OF THE PRESERVES BOARD

The early work of the board was primarily involved in organization. The lack of an appropriation for hiring an ecologist limited activities to formulation of the format for dedication statements and the development of general rules of management which could be used to regulate preserves until master plans could be formulated for each area.

During 1967 representatives of the Board appeared at several sessions of the Governmental Re-organization Sub-committee's hearings on the reorganization of various agencies into a department of Natural Resources. In each of the proposed reorganization plans the State Preserves Board would be eliminated and its duties would be assumed by one of the other divisions within the new department proposed. In commenting on these plans, the Preserves Board stressed the lack of protection for the areas preserved, the possibility of conflict of interest in management of the preserves, and the loss of interested citizen participation, provided by the present act. Following an appropriation for the 1967-68 biennium as a line item in the Conservation Commission budget, and the approval of the General Rules of Management, the board became more active in dedication and development of preserves.

Nine areas have been dedicated as preserves and an additional nine have been recommended by the board for preserve status (Table 1, Fig. 2). The majority of these areas are owned by the state, but the geologic sites concerned (in Johnson County at the Coralville Dam) are in Federal ownership. Five additional areas recommended by the Board have been included in the capital improvements item in the 1969-70 budget of the Conservation Commission.

Table 1
Dedicated State Preserves Areas

Name	County	Acres	Type of Preserve
Hayden Prairie	Howard	199	Nature
Kalsow Prairie	Pocahontas	160	Nature
Pilot Knob State Park	Hancock	368.81	Nature
Sheeder Prairie	Guthrie	25	Nature
White Pine Hollow	Dubuque	712	Nature
Fish Farm Mounds	Allamakee	2.94	Archeological
Turkey River Mounds	Clayton	62.1	Archeological
Wittrock Indian Village	O'Brien	5.42	Archeological
Fort Atkinson	Winneshiek	4.67	Historical

Areas Approved for Preserves Status by Board

Name	County	Acres	Type of Preserve
Bluffton Fir Stand	Winneshiek	94	Nature
Cayler Prairie	Dickenson	160	Nature
Merritt Forest	Clayton	20	Nature
Woodman Hollow	Webster	63	Nature
Fort Madison	Lee	?	Historic
Plum Grove	Johnson	4	Historic
Gitchie Manitou	Lyon	144	Geologic and Nature
Old Capitol Quarry	Johnson	1.5	Geologic
Stainbrook Preserve	Johnson	26	Geologic

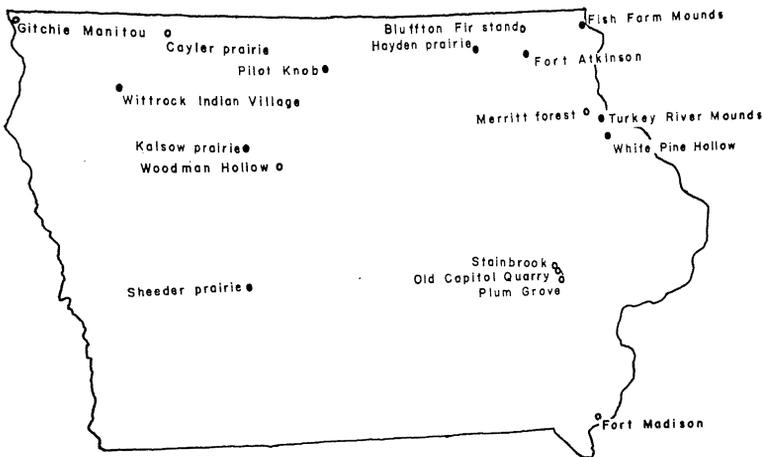


Fig. 2. Iowa State Preserves status in April, 1969. Dedicated Preserves. Areas approved for preserves status by Board.

During the summer of 1968, nine management or interpretive studies were undertaken by personnel at Iowa and Iowa State Universities. Reports of these studies are completed or pending. The studies included: a wildlife study on Kalsow prairie, management and interpretive studies on Pilot Knob, Stainbrook Preserve, Fish Farm Mounds and Fort Atkinson, and survey studies of several areas for possible acquisition by the state as preserves.

A graduate student in geology at the University of Iowa, Jean Rose, was hired as a half-time ecologist for the academic year 1968-69. She has begun formulating specific master plans for the dedicated areas, and developed interpretive signs which are being installed.

An informative brochure, and a copy of the law and the General Rules for Management have been published. The registry of possible sites has been started and now contain over 150 areas to be investigated.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In the future the program of support of individual interpretive studies and management plans written by scientific personnel in the state will be continued. Forms will be distributed to all interested persons in an attempt to enlarge the registry. Areas other than natural areas are especially needed since these are lacking in present listings. Both counties and private agencies will be encouraged to dedicate areas.

Major problems include the availability of qualified personnel for employment as ecologists for the Board, adequate funding from the legislature, and the danger of elimination of the Board by future legislative action. Each of these ultimately depend on public understanding of the necessity of preservation of our natural heritage. To encourage the development of an educated and informed public, the Board intends to enlarge its interpretive program by developing a guidebook to the preserves and a film strip for educational use.

While Iowa is one of the states with the greatest percentage of intensive land utilization, 95% in farms, and the least amount of public land ownership, less than 2% of forest in public ownership (Governor's Committee on Conservation of Outdoor Resources, 1964), it has always been concerned with conservation, as shown by the Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan, the development of the County Conservation Boards (Ennis, 1962), and the formation of the Governor's Committee on Conservation of Outdoor Resources. With the development of the State Preserves System, Iowa became the only state to attempt to combine all types of preserves: Natural, Historical, Archeological, Geologic and Scenic into a single system.

The success of this venture will depend on the interest and active cooperation of all the people of Iowa. With that cooperation we can demonstrate to a world that is becoming increasingly aware of the interrelationship of all aspects of the environment, that preservation must include all facets of the cultural background of man to be meaningful for his future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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