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Some Matters of Concern in the County Conservation Program in Iowa, With Special Reference to Land Use

J. HAROLD ENNIS

Abstract. Eighty-three of Iowa's 99 counties have established County Conservation Boards. County park areas, river access sites, wildlife areas and roadside parks in that order lead the list in numbers developed to date. Polk, Linn, and Black Hawk counties lead the list in area available with 2544, 2275, and 1952 acres respectively. Special safeguards are urged for administration of lands preserved for scientific purposes.

Since the passage of the necessary enabling legislation in 1955, there has been a steady growth of county conservation boards in Iowa. This important decentralization of much of this State's conservation activities was described briefly in an earlier report (Ennis, 1962). Today there are eighty-three Iowa counties out of ninety-nine that have "elected" to plan their own county-wide programs.

SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM TODAY

The kinds of projects which these county boards have chosen vary in nature. This is easily understood because the local expressed needs, the available tax base, the topography and natural resources of the county, and the board leadership are all variables. A tabulation of the County Conservation Areas, furnished by the office of Mr. H. W. Freed, Director, County Conservation Activities, dated December 14, 1964, lists the following types of areas for the 83 Iowa county boards:

Parks	133
River Accesses	102
Wildlife Areas	45
Roadside Parks	41
Historical Areas	12
Forest Areas	12
Recreational Areas	9
Headquarters	8
Outdoor Classrooms	5
Fishing Areas	5
Botanical Preserves	2
Misc. Areas	24
Total	403

It becomes obvious, of course, that most of the projects of the eighty-three boards are not widely diversified. As was al-

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ready suggested, this may be due to many reasons, limited tax funds, lack of suitable areas for preservation or development, limited vision or initiative on the part of board members, and similar factors. It is noticed that the concentration of board activity and interest has been upon parks and access to streams. These are clearly regarded as two of the chief functions of the total program.

At the moment, some boards, probably because they are newly formed, list no projects. Other county boards list several. As of Dec. 14, 1964, the largest numbers of areas (and acreage) are held by the following counties:

County	No. of Areas	Acres
Black Hawk	42 (inc. 24 small tracts from their Board of Supervisors)	1952
Linn	19	2275
Carroll	15	409
Franklin	15	262
Hardin	13	421
Delaware	16	572
Howard	15	455
Calhoun	11	135
Chickasaw	11	394
Clayton	11	252
Floyd	11	271
Polk	8	2545

The size of the areas may differ from a park of several hundred acres to a roadside park of one acre.

TOWARD A REEXAMINATION OF LAND USE

There is a constant need to state clearly and define with precision the uses assigned to these areas under the jurisdiction of the county conservation boards. This requires a continuing vigilance and re-examination, or the resource area may be greatly damaged or lost. A particularly scenic or historic spot may, through over-use as a picnic area, be destroyed. In recent years the near-destruction of Thoreau's original Walden Pond in Massachusetts is a tragic example.

The problem of alternate uses thus arises. In multi-purpose areas where camping, hunting, and picnicing are permitted, it may be found that, with the growth of nearby urban communities and heavy park usage, new controls are necessary. It may be decided that hunting is too dangerous to be permitted near widely used picnic or camping facilities. The writer knows of one tract used by youth groups for year-around camping where a no-hunting policy is now adopted because small game had been largely extirpated. Camping should include experiences with many forms of nature.

SPECIAL SAFEGUARDS FOR LANDS
PRESERVED FOR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES

Of special interest are those areas set aside for scientific purposes. At the present time the only two "botanical preserves" in the county board program in Iowa are in Linn County. One of these is the Rock Island Railroad Preserve. This tract of about 30 acres was given to the Linn County Conservation Board for the preservation of the unusual sand prairie and bog vegetation. The present Board membership understands this obligation and undoubtedly will attempt to insure that future board members will likewise accept their responsibilities to preserve this botanical treasure in its natural state. However, board memberships change. New members may not have the necessary background to understand the scientific importance of a botanical preserve. This problem is equally present for those County Boards attempting to preserve prehistoric Indian mounds and other antiquities.

The present procedure for acquiring land by a county board requires that a plan be filed with and approved by the Iowa State Conservation Commission (Rush, Wilkinson, and Barton, 1959). If this plan is carefully stated and Board policy is well understood, it may be that this is sufficient safeguard in most cases for areas of scientific value. However, it is the writer's experience that at times some difficulty is experienced in phrasing the limitations on land use. There is a feeling on the part of some Board members that controls reducing flexibility of land use are difficult to justify to the public.

This objection might possibly be met by writing into the original plan submitted to the Commission a provision that, in the case of lands of scientific value, some more technical body would be consulted before changes in land use would be granted. Such a technical body might even be given veto authority. It might be added that the Conservation Committee of the Iowa Academy of Science or Nature Conservancy, Inc., may well serve this function of protector.

At the state level, the same problem is present with the State Conservation Commission, again an appointive body with a rather frequently changing membership. The Palisades-Dows Preserve, under the jurisdiction of the Linn County Conservation Board, "is to be kept inviolate as a botanical and biological preserve . . . in keeping with the natural preserve principle of the adjoining Palisades-Kepler area south of the (Cedar) river. . . Hunting and trapping are strictly prohibited. . ." The latter area is supervised by the State Conservation Commission. Thus the two adjacent areas, both under the "preserve principle," are under the jurisdiction of two different and changing public

bodies. The question is again raised whether the changing membership of these two bodies provides a continuity sufficient to protect areas of scientific value.

THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM CONCEPT

Another type of problem, and a conservation opportunity, is presented by the growing interest in the outdoor-classroom concept. This movement promises to have wide application, from the grades through high school and college. It is a conservation opportunity which the county boards will not pass up. At the same time, it will be necessary for the boards to study their areas with care and define the land uses with accuracy. An area with rare flora requiring complete protection, with no collection permits allowed, would obviously not be suitable for either grade school or high school instruction. These distinctions should only be drawn by highly skilled personnel. Consequently, it is urgently suggested that the County Conservation Boards and their staffs might make use of the officers and directors of the Nature Conservancy (Iowa Chapter). Many of these officers are themselves members of the Iowa Academy of Science.

The following classification of these natural areas is suggested by The Nature Conservancy (1960):

Primeval Area. Undisturbed natural area which is truly unique or an outstanding representative of its kind. Access for any purpose must be severely restricted. Research is limited to that of a passive nature, such as direct observation. Thus use and therefore enjoyment of the area is by necessity restricted to a small number of people.

Natural Area Preserve. Here some evidence of past or present human use may be observable, but ordinarily no further manipulation of the flora and fauna allowed. However, some slight disturbance, may be necessary to gain certain values. Research is encouraged, but should be controlled within specific limits. Both direct and indirect interpretation is possible through marked nature trails, talks, pictures, and writings.

Nature Reserve. Such an area may be manipulated according to carefully created plans, such as to favor individual species of plants or animals. It may or may not have been already disturbed by human use. Thus some modification may be justified in order to better preserve. Research is the major emphasis of this type of area; integrated uses are possible.

Scenic Area. Areas preserved primarily because of their present beauty, such as cliffs, streams, vistas, vegetation and wildlife. Though public use may be intense, the natural values must not be destroyed. Research is incidental to interpretation.

School Natural Area. A natural area accessible to a school and used by its administrative and teaching staffs for educational purposes—participation, experimentation, interpretation.”

In terms of the above classification, the Rock Island Railroad Preserve might be called a Primeval Area, and the Palisades-Dows Preserve labeled a Natural Area Preserve. Other areas capable of bearing a heavier traffic of grade and high school students would be called a School Natural Area.

It is understandable that virtually all of the efforts of County Conservation Boards during the last eight years have been devoted to parks, stream access, and similar areas of broad public purpose. This emphasis will continue. However, a start has been made in projects of a dominantly scientific and educational nature. These latter projects are clearly within the County Board law. Nevertheless, the fullest cooperation of all agencies is needed to achieve the highest scientific and educational values in conservation.

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Iowa Squirrels: Hunting Statistics, Sex and Age Ratios, and the Influence of Mast and Agriculture

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Abstract. Fox and gray squirrels, *Sciurus niger rufiventor* Geoffroy and *S. carolinensis pennsylvanicus* Ord, are commonly hunted in Iowa. Average hunting success for 12 years as reported by hunter-cooperators was 0.8 squirrels bagged and 1.8 seen per gun hour. Significant variations in hunting success from one season to another were found. One squirrel was reported crippled for every 14.8 killed. Fox squirrels comprised 87.1% of the total kill; grays, 12.9%. Conservation officer contacts indicated actual hunting success was below that reported by hunter-cooperators. The cooperators were assumed to be hunters with above average skill as compared to average ability of those contacted by conservation officers. Hunters average 6.1 trips per season and spent an average of 2.8 hours per trip. The average size of hunting parties was 1.4. Hunting success varied little through the season. Two-thirds of all hunting effort was expended during the first month each season. Dogs were found detrimental to hunting success.

Sex ratios of 119.2 males/100 females for fox and 110.3 males/100 females for gray squirrels were found. Age ratios varied somewhat from year to year. In fox squirrels the 14-year average was 53.9% juveniles; in grays, 49.4% juveniles. A simple method of measuring tree mast yield is described. The data indicate mast yield influences production of squirrels and subsequent hunting success in Iowa, although not as drastically as has been reported in other states. Evidence is presented which indicates the mast influence is mitigated somewhat by intensive agriculture. Squirrels probably rely

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