THE PROPOSED PARK AS A FOREST RESERVE

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If the State of Wisconsin shall be so fortunate as to secure Devil’s Lake as a State park, there will be a splendid opportunity to manage the timber land surrounding the lake as a forest reserve. There is nothing unusual about combining the two, for all forest reserves are wild parks, and one of the reasons for their creation is to provide for all the people great outdoor breathing places, where they may go in summer and gain the health and pleasure which outdoor life in the woods gives so bountifully.

In the first place, in order that the water in the lake may be kept at a more or less uniform level, it is absolutely necessary to protect the watersheds of the two streams which flow into the lake. In former years the water was at a much higher level, but as the forests were destroyed on the watersheds the amount of water which flowed into the lake has gradually diminished; and then, too, it has not come fairly evenly, month after month, but the major portion of it in a rush in the few weeks in early spring, when the snow on the exposed watersheds was melting rapidly. Forests regulate stream flow, for they act as a great sponge and give off the moisture which they absorb slowly and evenly, so that streams rising in a forested region are remarkably uniform throughout the year, while those rising in a bare, cut-over region are subject to severe freshets, followed by periods of extremely low water.

This is so well known in all foreign countries, where forestry is practised, that the cutting of timber on or near the headwaters of all important streams is very carefully regulated by law. In the San Bernardino Mountains, in California, observations on stream flow have been taken for several years and clearly show the connection between run-off and forests; or, in other words, the influence which the forest
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has in regulating stream flow. In the forested area the run-off was only three per cent of the precipitation, while on the non-forested area it was forty per cent. This indicates the tremendous influence which forests have in checking and holding the run-off, but still more instructive is the fact that three months after the rain had ceased to fall the forested areas were giving off over fifteen per cent of the original precipitation. Then, too, on bare slopes the loss of moisture through rapid evaporation is tremendous, while in the dense shade of the forests the falling rain and melting snow sink into the leaves and humus, to reach the streams through underground channels after weeks or months. This explains why it will be so important for the State to own the watersheds of the streams flowing into Devil's Lake, in order to control and increase the supply of water by preventing any further destruction of the forests and repairing the damage which has already been done. Where the saw-log timber has been cut out and the fires have run the ground is being restocked by nature, but slowly and with an inferior lot of young hardwoods. White pine, the king of Wisconsin timber trees, grows well around the lake and should be planted extensively by the State, both on account of the revenue it will yield in the future and also because of its beauty in a park, especially when in mixture with hardwoods. Many young white pine are now coming up, but the old seed trees are too few and isolated to do it all and must be assisted.

The idea of planting forest trees over large areas is surprising to every one who has not come in touch with forestry work, but in reality it is very simple and comparatively inexpensive, as planting 1,200 trees per acre should not cost, including plants and labor, over five to six dollars per acre, or say half a cent per tree. The Government and various states are annually planting thousands of acres within forest reserves, but, of course, they use small seedlings from two to three years old, and raise their own trees. The State should start a nursery at Devil's Lake and raise all the valuable timber trees which will do well in that region, and then plant where necessary on both watersheds and reforest the bare cut-over land which extends back from the bluffs. Situated as it is in the center of the southern portion of the State, the lake is easily
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accessible to a very large percentage of the population of Wisconsin, and it would seem, therefore, that the State can well afford to acquire enough land not only to protect the lake itself, but also to create a large woodland park or forest reserve, which should be cared for under systematic forest management. This would mean that the large, mature timber would be cut and sold so as to yield a fund for managing and improving the park, but carefully, under forestry methods, so as not to injure the young growth, but to secure the reproduction of the most valuable and beautiful species. To many people the idea of carrying on lumbering operations in a park will seem very strange, but those who have seen the splendidly managed forests of Germany, particularly the Schwartzwald, will testify that forestry makes it possible to secure a large revenue and still have the forests all the more thrifty and beautiful for the cutting. When the park has been established, a very attractive feature would be to stock a portion or all of it with game native to the State.

In nearly all the foreign countries, besides the forest reserves there are numerous wild parks stocked with game, and they are a never-ending source of instruction and delight to the people, who, leaving the cities on a holiday, can within an hour or two see game in their native haunts. All kinds of game, except waterfowl, are becoming very scarce in the southern portion of the State, and there are thousands of people in our cities to whom this feature of stocking the park with game would appeal most strongly.

Wisconsin has few spots which are naturally suited for State parks and at the same time centrally located, and therefore it is to be hoped that before it is too late the Legislature may take the necessary steps to acquire for the use and pleasure of all the people Devil’s Lake, which nature has made so grand and beautiful.
THE DISTANT HORIZON MARKS THE WESTERN BOUNDARY OF THE PROPOSED PARK