WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Extraordinary advancement in conservation in Wisconsin resulted from the fund of approximately $2,045,703 contributed by the Works Progress Administration between September, 1935 and June 15, 1936. These monies were expended largely under the direction of the Conservation Commission to further long-planned developments.

On June 30, 1936 a total of 3,421 WPA workers were augmenting regular conservation crews, advancing the state program in the fields of water conservation, fish hatchery repair and improvement, lake and stream improvement, forest protection and management, fur and game farm work, and state park improvement. Much of the money spent by WPA on conservation was in the nature of capital investment.

The WPA program provided that the initiative for the inauguration of all projects should come from state, county, and local officials familiar with the developmental needs of the state. WPA rehabilitation projects included building dams to restore disappearing lakes; making lakes and streams better habitats for game fish; clearing brush and slash from thousands of acres of forest crop land; and the building of ranger stations, opening up miles of fire lanes and truck trails and stringing new telephone lines.

With the exception of work in the field of water conservation, which was sponsored by local units of government, all of the WPA conservation activity was part of a statewide program under the direction of the State Conservation Commission. On June 30 a total of 113 individual projects was operating under the supervision of department experts. Nineteen projects had been completed, and 53 others which had been started were temporarily discontinued. For work in this division of conservation activity, the WPA had expended $1,547,154, while the Conservation Commission had contributed $163,961. Of the 2,720 WPA workers employed on this part of the program, more than 90 percent were taken from relief rolls and were given an average wage of $45.94 a month.

LAKE RESTORATION

The revival of some of northern Wisconsin's dying lakes is one of the important undertakings of WPA in the field of conservation. These restorations are important not only from a recreational standpoint but also to serve as a fundamental purpose of water control and the maintenance of ground water levels. In many cases restoration of water levels means a reinstatement of taxable land values.
The Conservation Commission was instrumental in developing plans for lake and stream restorations in cooperation with the state hydraulic division of WPA and county planning committees.

Funds were allotted for 14 dams, some of which were designed to replace old logging dams, others to be built at the outlet of lakes to restore and control water levels, and one to divert flood waters from the Totogatic River to several receding lakes in the vicinity. Each dam will not only restore one particular lake, but in many instances chains of lakes will be affected. On June 30 one of the dams was completed and work proceeded on 11 others.

The first dam to be completed, located on Slim River in Washburn county, has restored a logging lake which had completely disappeared when the lumberman's dam washed out. The project has added 21,000 feet of new lake frontage and has increased the valuation of the land around this lake by at least $15,000. A second dam, which was practically completed except for additional rip-rapping and backfilling, is on the St. Croix River in Douglas county. On June 30 water held back by this dam had already reached the halfway level over the entire flowage area of nearly 3,200 acres. When the water rises to its full height, it will create a beautiful lake more than seven miles long and dotted with 17 wooded islands. This lake, together with stretches of the St. Croix River made navigable by the dam, will furnish 15 miles of boating in ideal vacation country.

Other dams, which were at least 90 percent complete on June 30, are the Clam Lake dam on the Clam River in Burnett county with a flowage of 1,725 acres; the Little Rice on the Wolf River in Forest county, which has a flowage of 2,050 acres; the Billy Boy on the Court O'Reilles River in Sawyer county, where an 845-acre lake is being restored; and the Shay on the Turtle River in Iron county, where a flowage of 1,140 acres is being flooded.

On the Lake Nancy dam in Washburn county—the first project undertaken in Wisconsin under the recent legislation permitting diversion of water from one water course to another—WPA workmen had constructed one section of the coffer dam and were pouring concrete for the permanent structure. By means of a channel from the dam, flood waters of the Totogatic will be turned through the three Kimball lakes and into Lake Nancy, which has fallen six feet from its normal height, and will maintain water levels in this drought stricken chain. Seepage from the larger bodies of water will help to raise the level of two smaller lakes not directly connected in this water course. In addition to the effect on the six lakes, flowage created by the dam will form an entirely new lake about 1,700 acres in area. From Lake Nancy the water will flow through another channel back into the Totogatic, several miles below the point where it was originally diverted from its course.

Farther east on the same river, in Sawyer county, work on a dam, which will create the largest entirely new lake in the program, was 35 percent complete on June 30. Water from twelve to sixteen feet deep will cover the flowage area of 2,800 acres, creating a new lake
frontage of approximately one hundred seventy thousand feet. At a conservative estimated value for lake frontage of 75 cents per front foot, land that is now tax delinquent will have an estimated valuation of $127,500. A tax income of as high as $6,400 per year from this land has been predicted for Sawyer county.

Other northern Wisconsin lake restoration dams include the Musser in Price county, which was 85 percent complete; the Prentice in the same county, 80 percent complete; the Eau Claire in Eau Claire county, 50 percent complete; and the Minerva in Burnett, 60 percent complete.

Four smaller dams also being constructed create recreational lakes in park areas in communities farther south in the state. They are located at Kewaskum in Washington county; Colfax in Dunn county; Four Mile creek in Juneau county; and the Yellow River in Juneau county. WPA expenditures for these four projects totaled $71,668 of which the sponsors contributed $9,586.

When all of the new and restored lakes are flooded, the Conservation Commission plans to stock them with game fish supplied by the state hatcheries.

DRAINAGE WORK

In central Wisconsin another phase of the WPA draining control activity will restore nearly three hundred thousand acres of semi-desert wasteland to economic productivity. By building 32 drainage control dams, the WPA has completed a program begun by a previous governmental agency to rebuild an area brought to desolation by unwise land utilization. More than 85 percent of the land in some drainage districts reverted to county governments through delinquent tax sales.

By building dams in these ditches, the disastrous drainage they induced is being checked and controlled. A total of 240 has been completed on the WPA and the previous work relief program of the WERA. Because the dams are two feet higher than the level of the land, it will be possible to flood the surrounding country in case peat fires occur. In cranberry districts the dams will store water which can be used by growers to flood marshes and protect their crops from frosts. Some of the others are designed merely to maintain the ground water levels high enough to make agriculture again profitable on the fringes of the marshland. Still others have been constructed so that areas above them can be flooded, thereby making ponds to form nesting refuges for wild game birds.

WPA expenditures for labor and materials used in constructing these dams totaled $105,432, of which $939 was contributed by local sponsors. This investment will bring tangible returns in the form of income from cranberry, fur, and moss gathering industries which will supplant submarginal agriculture in most of the region. An abundance of wild game and fish will make this section of the state attractive to hunters, fishermen, and tourists. When the ground water level
rises, agriculture on the better soil and the edges of the marsh will again become profitable, and as a result thousands of acres will be economically productive.

STREAM IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Work on the WPA lake and stream improvement program is designed to restore some of the natural conditions favorable to fish life. During the winter WPA workmen constructed brush refuges and alder tangles from brush and saplings, weighted them down with boulders and sand bags, and sunk them through holes cut in the ice. They will provide shelters where small fry can escape from larger fish. The structures also promote insect life necessary for fish food. Bass spawning boxes and radial minnow spawners were constructed and placed in numerous lakes. Approximately twenty-five thousand of these structures were introduced into more than one hundred lakes during the winter, and nearly 1,500 men were given employment on this program.

Stream improvement projects were revived in the spring as the lake improvement work was completed, and on June 30 were carried on in twenty counties of the state. To speed up the flow of water in sluggish streams, WPA workmen are building wing dams and stream deflectors which are placed at the proper angle with the current. Faster water means deeper streams, less silt, and more exposed gravel where trout can lay their eggs. It also means the elimination of warm, stagnant ponds. As a result the water will be cooled as much as ten degrees, making it more inviting to trout and fishermen alike. Other types of stream improvement include building bank covers to provide shade and protection, and planting river banks with trees and shrubs to restore, insofar as possible, the natural stream cover.

FOREST PROTECTION AID

In the field of forest protection, 59 WPA projects were operating on June 30. Building ranger stations and garages, repairing telephone wires and stringing new lines, clearing fire breaks and fire lanes, and constructing truck trails are included in the work done. In the field of fire prevention WPA workmen have completed more than five thousand acres of slash disposal, brush and snag removal, and general fire hazard reduction work. They have also completed nearly three hundred miles of roadside clearing, truck trail repair, and construction.

A total of 22 new ranger stations and four additional combination warehouses and garages has been built. Two of the stations are district ranger headquarters, with residence for rangers. Twenty of them combine offices, five-stall garages, and storage room for smaller equipment in attractive story and a half buildings constructed of concrete blocks or stone. The four garage and warehouse buildings each
have a six-stall garage and a second floor for storage. One ranger station, located at Lake Tomahawk in Oneida county, and two garages and warehouses were completed on June 30. Nine other stations and remaining two warehouses were more than 70 percent complete.

Approximately one hundred and seventy miles of outmoded iron wire have been replaced with new copper lines in the Conservation Department's telephone system. In addition 58 miles of new lines have been built in this communication network. WPA workmen have also cleared 373 miles of telephone routes of brush and trees which eventually would interfere with the operation of the system.

Construction of an airplane hangar has been started as another WPA project at Tomahawk, the state forest protection headquarters.

FOREST MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

Five projects in the field of forest management—including forest stand improvement, silviculture treatment, and surveys for the planting of shelterbelts and windbreaks—were operating on June 30. Two other shelterbelt projects have been completed. Three surveys were made in light soil counties—Adams, Waupaca, and Wood—where dust storms wrought great damage. Under the supervision of a state forester WPA workmen surveyed farms in the most severely affected regions and worked out plans with the farmers for the planting of shelterbelts or windbreaks which will help check wind erosion. Maps showing the prospective location of the shelterbelts, the kind of soil, and the most desirable type of trees to be used have been prepared. Farmers will obtain trees for planting from the state nurseries.

OTHER COOPERATIVE MEASURES

The Conservation Commission sponsored WPA projects to also improve facilities at the state fish hatcheries. A total of 21 projects was undertaken at the hatcheries, including repair and improvement of hatchery buildings, construction of new buildings, construction of bass rearing ponds, and improvement of the water supply.

Much of the building work of a long-time program at the State Experimental Game and Fur Farm, Poynette, has been completed with WPA labor. The work included building of electric brooders, a large dining and lecture hall, a cold storage and slaughter house, a barn, and numerous pens and cages.

Additional facilities are being provided at the Conservation Department law enforcement headquarters at Oshkosh. A new storage and boat house, four patrol boats, and new docks and hoists have been constructed, and other buildings have been painted and repaired.

Work has also been carried on at Terry Andrae, Tower Hill, and Ojibwa State Parks.
Construction of a new raceway on a WPA project at the fish hatchery at Salmo, Bayfield county, will increase the capacity of the hatchery for game fish rearing.

WPA workmen are using lumber obtained from dead or undesirable trees to construct bass spawning boxes on a WPA lake and stream improvement program in Dunn county.