

**“LOGGING AND LAND STEWARDSHIP
HISTORY NEAR THE
WISCONSIN-MICHIGAN BORDER ”**

**Proceedings
of
Seventeenth Annual Meeting
of
Forest History Association
of Wisconsin, Inc.**

**A Brief History of the Beginning of the
Vilas County Forest**

By Walter Mayo

**October 10 - 11, 1992
Eagle River, Wisconsin**

By the late 1880's and early 1900's, most of the large old growth pine forests were logged off in Vilas County. The area was left as a tinder box of slash for forest fires that often destroyed everything in its path, including wild life, small stands of timber, sapling and seedlings which would have developed into future forests. The forest floor was burned down to the subsoil. This impeded revegetation of the area for some time.

The few good points were expressed by some of the early settlers, which were the ease of clearing the land, abundance of blueberry crops, and destroying the wood tick population.

Land Sharks, as they were then called, had quite an impact on the settling of this area by people looking for a parcel of land which they could farm. The land agents grabbed up large tracts of land from the lumber companies and sold the land in small parcels, usually 40 acres with a 16'X 24' building on it. These early settlers were given the impression of what good land this was for fanning. Some of it was, but the rest was a myth. The people who were fortunate enough to get the good land were successful. Those who were not so lucky, pulled up stakes and left the land go delinquent on the tax rolls.

This is how the county acquired thousands of acres of delinquent tax land which were placed on the tax rolls for future land uses. These became county forest lands, parks, and recreational areas.

In 1928 the county adopted a land zoning plan whereby the county could trade land with settlers who were located a distance from the schools. This would cut down on school busing, road maintenance, and snow plowing. It worked out quite well for many of the settlers. This was a good start in the right direction toward future zoning and land usage. It also prompted a plan for a future county forest reserve program. This was accomplished by Resolution #2, which was presented to the Vilas County Board of Supervisors for their approval in June 1932. This resolution was published for public comments, etc. If there were no objections to this resolution after 90 days, it would be adopted, which happened.

On November 16, 1932, the county board elected to have the Vilas County Agricultural Committee charged with the administration of all county forestry activities, and the county agent to be the administrator. The committee was to work in cooperation with the W.C.D.(Wisconsin Conservation Department).

Prior to this, the Chequamagon and Nicolet National Forest were adding Vilas County delinquent lands to their forest and recreation programs. The W.C.D. also followed the same plan. The county also traded lands with both the state and federal government, which enabled better management for all involved.

Several of the townships acquired these delinquent lands to start a forestry program of their own. On November 12, 1947, the zoning map for the county was initiated, and the forestry and recreation zones were mapped out. This master plan showed all lands owned by federal, the state, and land commission entities, as well as Vilas County forest crop land, county reserve lands, and paper company lands. Resolution #2 finalized this map on February 28, 1948.

The first tree planting on the county forest started in the Conover area in 1932. A D.4 Cat was rented from the town of Washington, and a fire plow was used to make a furrow to hand plant the jack pine seedlings. Jack pine was readily available for planting, and was a good species to plant in this sandy area. Later on, Vilas, Oneida, and Iron counties bought a tree planter which was used by the three countries, under a tri-country program. Later, around the 1950's, the county bought a tree planter of their own which was steadily used each spring and fall.

The county would rent out the planter on a per day use to people who wanted to do some planting on their private holdings. This practice really added to the development of hundreds of acres of private forests.

Vilas County's forest lands, both forest crop and county reserve lands, with good management, have been very productive as these early plantings developed. Now the sites are being replanted after each harvest. Due to a good state fire protection program, forest fires have been kept to a minimum.

BY: Walter Mayo - A native of Eagle River, WI, with a varied background, including a stint with the CCC and the Knuth Brothers Lumber Company. From 1964 to 1979 he was the Vilas County Forest Administrator. He has been a member of FHAW since 1975 and Walt has published, *The History of Logging and Logging Camps, 1856-1982*