

A JOINT REPORT ¹³

to ¹⁶

GOVERNOR ROBERT D. BLUE

and -

THE IOWA CONSERVATION COMMISSION ⁶⁰

By

THE CONSERVATION STUDY COMMITTEE

APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR ⁶⁰

And

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PRESIDENT, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE ⁶²

WASHINGTON, D. C.

AT THE REQUEST OF

THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION ^{af}

This report is the result of ~~the~~^a study of ~~the~~^{of} Iowa State Conservation Commission's authority and organization and the conservation program for which it is responsible with references to related activities that affect the success of its operation. This study was made at the request of Governor Robert D. Blue and ^{the} Conservation Commission.

In this study the basic legislative authority, the organization of the Commission and its staff and its working program were checked by a review of available records and by personal interviews with many persons both within and without the Commission.

Every possible courtesy was extended by all officials and access to records and files was freely given.

It should be made clear that it does not evaluate the entire program although all operations have been checked. This review of the accomplishments against the background of the Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan indicates that much worthwhile progress has been made and that Iowa can be proud of the results so far attained.

This report presents suggestions for legislation, the improvement of the Conservation Commission organization and recommendations that ~~would~~^{will}, if carried out, stimulate those phases of the twenty-five year plan which have not moved forward as rapidly as others.

PROGRAM

The Iowa Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan published in 1933 was used as a basis for measuring results achieved since that time. That sound basic plan clearly recognized the difficulty of maintaining all of Iowa's renewable natural resources and providing for their maximum use in an area so intensively farmed. Iowa with ninety-six percent of its area in farms has the highest proportion of such land of any state. This one factor makes it mandatory that any wildlife or forestry program be fitted into and exist with the predominant agricultural use of land.

Changing agricultural practices directly affect for good or evil wildlife populations. Intensive farming due primarily to high prices, and the increasing use of mechanical corn pickers, have decreased available winter cover and the increasing use of power driven mowers has increased the mortality of nesting upland birds. These and other practices have increased the difficulty of producing adequate crops of upland game and should be considered in judging the effectiveness of any wildlife management program.

Agricultural practices past, as well as present, have caused excessive soil erosion. This has resulted in reduction of the biological productivity of streams and lakes because of excessive siltation. Pollution of lakes and streams and deforestation are other major adverse factors affecting fish and wildlife population.

Recognition of the adverse effect of these and other human activities upon natural resources, resulted in studies that produced a forward looking long time program for restoration and

better management of the basic resources of soils and waters and their products.

The records indicate that excellent progress has been made in the restoration and improvement of natural lakes, in the planning and construction of artificial lakes and in the development of a state park system.

Good progress has been made in the game program, particularly in that part dealing with waterfowl and quail. A number of excellent project areas have been acquired and partially or completely developed, but the development of habitat on private lands has not moved forward as rapidly as other phases.

The fishery management program has moved forward in artificial propagation, fish rescue work, stream and lake surveys and preparation of management plans for each water area. It should be pointed out that success of fishery management is directly affected by the progress of natural lake restoration, construction of artificial lakes and stream improvements. Artificial propagation and stocking can do little more than maintain present stocks of fish until improvement programs make the waters capable of sustaining greater fish populations.

The forestry and stream improvement programs, both the responsibility of the Conservation Commission, and the soil erosion control program, which is not now legally within Commission jurisdiction but which is vital to the success of many of its projects, have not kept pace with those previously mentioned.

Iowa with the nation's most completely farmed land surface has been slow in applying good land management practices designed to prevent deterioration of its rich soils.

While soil erosion control has not been considered a responsibility of the Conservation Commission, good land management is such an important factor in the success or failure of many of its projects that it should be stressed in evaluating the results of its work and weighing its chances of future success.

The forestry program has not had adequate appropriations and has lacked wide popular support and aggressive leadership by the Conservation Commission.

The stream improvement program has not moved ahead as rapidly as other phases of the twenty-five year plan. This work is intimately related to soil erosion control and results will be difficult to obtain until good land management is practiced within the watershed of streams on which work is done.

Stream improvement efforts are not as certain to produce results nor will results be as easily demonstrated to the public as those obtained by the construction of artificial lakes. Nevertheless such work is a vital part of the overall conservation plan. The Commission has studies under way designed to develop a stream improvement program. This is a correct approach to this complicated problem and should be pushed vigorously.

BASIC LEGISLATION 17

The basic legislation under which the Commission operates is good - in fact better than in the majority of states. The Commission has operated with much better than average success in carrying out its functions and programs, a fact which indicates the soundness of conservation laws.

Certain amendments to these laws are desirable to provide better administration and these are indicated in detail later in the report.

The most serious gaps in the general conservation laws are the confusing financial set-up under which the Commission operates, the lack of adequate laws to control pollution of publicly owned waters and the weakness of the soil conservation district's Act.

Experience in other states has shown that police power vested in the Soil Conservation districts is necessary to prevent an occasional land owner from rendering ineffective the efforts of adjoining owners.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION

The Commission is established as an independent agency with wide powers to carry on its operations within the general laws of the state. It is authorized to: employ personnel; fix standards of employment; fix salaries (subject to the approval of the Comptroller or the Executive Council) except those of the Director and the Conservation Officers which are fixed by law; employ a Director and on his recommendation to establish other positions; dismiss employees upon the Director's recommendation; make regulations governing the taking of game and fish; purchase lands for conservation purposes; establish refuges; propagate game and fish; establish and maintain parks and state forests; practice forestry; carry out certain soil erosion control programs when necessary to protect publicly owned waters; and to carry out a wide variety of Conservation projects.

The overall accomplishments of this important Commission have been good. The Commissioners are deeply interested in the work for which they are responsible and have devoted much time and effort to it. Mistakes, inevitable in any constructive program have undoubtedly been made, but there is no evidence to indicate that they have been anything more than errors in judgment.

The greatest single weakness in the present organization is that of totally inadequate pay scales. Compensation for all employees from the Director down is far below that of successful competitive conservation organizations in other states. The result has been that the young men employed by the Commission have often been hired by other Conservation organizations as soon as their work became outstanding. Only employees who chose to remain for

for personal reasons and those whose work has not yet been outstanding enough to attract other offers have remained.

There are valuable employees with long experience and good young men with excellent training who will develop with experience. There are, however, too few employees with from five to ten years working experience added to their technical training. Normally this class of employees would be able to shoulder the burden of the expanding conservation program. Due to the shortage of men in this group the higher administrative officers who should be doing the overall thinking, planning and coordinating, are overwhelmed with detail work.

Iowa has trained many men in the past fifteen years who are now working in widely scattered states at far higher salaries than corresponding positions under the Iowa Conservation Commission. Salaries of all positions from that of Director down must be increased by a minimum of fifty percent if this state is to compete with other agencies who are bidding for the services of trained and experienced individuals.

This situation is caused by two conditions, the legislative fixing of certain salaries including that of the Director, and by the fact that pay scales must be approved by the Comptroller or the Executive Council as well as the Commission. To correct this situation certain legislation is recommended. In addition to legislation a comprehensive program of salary revision by the Executive Council and the Commission will be necessary.

This investigation was requested by the Governor and the Commission because of reports alleging political interference, differences between the Governor and Commission, and friction within the staff of the Commission.

Careful inquiry has failed to produce any evidence of political interference in the affairs of the Commission by any elected officer. Neither has any evidence indicated that the Governor has attempted to dictate appointments to positions on the staff. There have been two occasions on which he has issued instructions to the Commission regarding the assignments of individuals already on the staff. These constitute the only indication of any infringement on the duties of the Commission. The Governor has made suggestions regarding the operation of the Commission with which the Commission has not always agreed but there is no evidence of political pressure to force compliance with such suggestions.

On several occasions Commission recommendations designed to correct at least partially the present inadequate salary rates have not been approved. This failure to act has handicapped efforts to add to the staff and to attract and hold better men. There have also been delays in obtaining approval of land acquisition proposals which have slowed up the work.

Reports of political pressure to accept certain projects have come to attention. The more recent of these are the Osceola and Allerton reservoirs.

The Osceola reservoir was given to the state free of encumbrance. It has provided good fishing in the past, but the dam is in need of repairs which may make it an expensive gift.

Local groups pressed the state to take over this unit, but political pressure, if any, on this project other than that from local groups is difficult to establish. Delay in approving other land acquisition projects may have been used as a means of pressure to secure action on this project.

The Allerton reservoir purchase was authorized twice by special legislation. A proposed purchase contract under the first authorization was rejected on advice of the Attorney General because of unacceptable reservations. A later Bill passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor, gave the Commission authority to pass on the title and the reservoir was purchased, after further conference with the Attorney General. It would appear from this record that if any mistake was made the legislature, the Governor and the Conservation Commission share the responsibility for it.

It might be stated that old reservoirs are often of questionable value. Siltation of a reservoir decreases its value for fishing and ultimately for other uses. Such projects should be included in the state water management program only after careful surveys indicate a sufficiently long life to justify cost of needed repairs and subsequent maintenance.

Reported friction within the staff undoubtedly existed and still exists.

A certain amount of office gossip, expressions of resentment by individuals whose viewpoint has not prevailed in determining policies, and the voicing of disappointment when a promotion is given to some other person, is inevitable in any organization. On some occasions too much attention has been paid to such talk by both the Commission and higher administrative officials.

Expressions of varying viewpoints within the staff are healthy and should be encouraged prior to making decisions and establishing policies. This insures the presentation of various aspects of the problem, utilizes the ability and experience of all staff members and provides a broader basis for a decision than would be possible without such free expression.

Differences of opinion become harmful whenever they are carried outside the organization after a decision has been made. This has unquestionably occurred frequently and was participated in by some of the present as well as some of the recently dismissed personnel. Such actions should be grounds for dismissal since no organization can carry out an efficient program unless established decisions and policies are loyally supported. No person, however able, is of use unless that person is a loyal member of the organization.

There is evidence that employees have on occasion developed or attempted to develop outside pressures to insure the adoption of proposed programs by the Commission. Such a practice makes it difficult for an organization to develop an intelligent program and employees who use it should be dismissed.

Staff difficulties have also undoubtedly been accentuated by the low salary scale and the uncertainty that it causes to individuals. Competent service cannot be given by persons under constant tension because of compensation inadequate to meet ordinary living costs and employees of the Commission are among those hit hardest by rising prices and an inflated economy.

Another cause of staff difficulties is the lack of any clear cut line of demarkation between the policy making functions of

the Commission and the administrative duties of the staff. This condition can only result in bickering among the personnel and a confused feeling of trying to serve many masters.

The minutes of the Commission for March 1947 contain a statement of policies and functions of the Commission and the Director in which the Commission reserves powers for itself that are a mixture of policy and administrative functions. This statement needs revision and clarification.

The Commission consisting of seven citizens meeting at intervals cannot well handle administrative matters. It is recommended that it define its functions to include the following types of activities:

1. Outlining major policies and programs.
2. Approving projects to carry out the program.
3. Adopting administrative orders.
4. Carrying out sufficient inspection to determine that its policies and programs are adequately executed.
5. Approving qualifications and salary rates for personnel.
6. Selecting a Director to be held responsible for administration.
7. Approving personnel recommended by the Director.

In the interests of good administration the Commissioners should not, as a group, or individually, issue instructions or orders to any subordinate. Commissioners should not permit employees to discuss with them their individual problems or assignments but should establish a system whereby appeals and information reach the Commission through regular channels. The uncertainties that develop when official business is handled on

a personal rather than an impersonal basis contributes to poor morale and every effort should be made to avoid such effects.

Information has been received and evidence found that on some occasions Commissioners have issued direct orders to employees; that inspections of proposed purchase areas have been made without the presence of staff members; that inspections have been made of work projects in the field without giving the responsible employee any opportunity to present information, and that individual Commissioners spend much time with certain employees. Such actions are indications of a fundamental difficulty, namely, the failure of the Commission to distinguish clearly between its own policy making functions and the administrative functions which should be delegated to the Director. No Director however competent, can build and maintain an efficient organization if there is any confusion in his mind or in that of the staff members regarding his authority as administrator.

The files of the Commission contain a memorandum dated October 17, 1946, outlining the duties of the key personnel which could be expanded to include an outline of the duties and responsibility of each class of employees.

In addition to a job classification there is need for an outline of qualifications for each class of employees. These should provide educational or experience requirements, or both. At the present there is no accepted standards for judging the qualifications of applicants for the various positions.

It is evident that a training program both for new and present employees to give them a better concept of their part in the rapidly growing conservation program would result in a better

informed staff.

The Commission has full power, on the recommendation of the Director, to discharge any employee but has seldom used that right. The records show that it has preferred to try persons not completely satisfactory in one position in other assignments before dismissal. While such a policy has much to commend it, there is room for improvement in the handling of personnel problems.

The staff is at present undermanned to carry out the program for which funds have already been provided. This is particularly true in the units directly responsible for carrying out the capital improvement program.

At present all biological research work is carried on in the cooperative unit at Iowa State College. Largely because it has been under way longer more basic information is available in the game than in the fisheries field. The latter needs expansion to provide definite information needed for the better management of streams and lakes. Such research should for the present be directed toward solution of the most pressing management problems.

The educational program is good as far as it goes, but in view of the tremendous problems involved in carrying on a conservation program in an intensively farmed state an educational program, particularly in the schools, is a vital necessity. The records show that conservation officers and other personnel carry on work designed to inform the people on basic conservation problems. However, the present public relations staff cannot prepare basic material necessary for such important work in addition to present assignments.

FUNDS

Iowa is mindful of the importance of these basic natural resources and is inclined to be generous with funds for such work. Money available to the Conservation Commission has increased in each of the last three fiscal years.

The total funds for each fiscal year are:

*July 1, 1944-June 30, 1945 - \$ 851,559.95

July 1, 1945-June 30, 1946 - 1,020,933.14

July 1, 1946-June 30, 1947 - 3,943,496.82

*A balance of \$509,936.62 was available on July 1, 1944.

Included in this are legislative appropriations and the seven months receipts under the increased hunting and fishing license fees provided by the last Legislature. From April 1, 1947, to December 1, 1947, receipts in dollars were 32.07% greater than the corresponding period in the preceding fiscal year and the number of licenses sold decreased only 9.78% in the same period. Indications are that license sales in November and not yet entirely reported will cut the reported decrease in the number of licenses sold.

There has been little protest over this increase which indicates a growing appreciation by hunters and fishermen of the necessity of providing funds to do the job. As the present habitat improvement program in cooperation with soil conservation districts gains momentum and stream improvement programs follow more funds will be needed. Iowa license fees are still relatively low and it is probable that another increase would be acceptable to license buyers when they see the results of work accomplished.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATION 52

It is recommended that -

- (1) The Soil Conservation District's Law (Chap. 160, Iowa Code 1946) be amended to give to the districts power to compel compliance with soil erosion and water control programs adopted by the districts.

(2) Comment: The lack of authority to force compliance by a few land owners can render this program ineffective. This is the most serious defect in conservation legislation found in this study. While soil erosion control is not a direct responsibility of the Conservation Commission, the lack of an adequate soil conservation program can render futile many of its efforts to improve streams and provide better wildlife habitat.

- (2) A greatly increased state appropriation be made available to the State Soil Conservation Committee for more intensive soil erosion control activities and a strong corps of engineers and other soil erosion control technicians be provided to assist organized soil conservation districts in accelerating work programs. Federal technicians of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service are far too few to assist in developing comprehensive plans rapidly enough to meet the basic economic and conservation needs of the state. The Conservation Commission and the State Soil Conservation Committee should work closely together in this most important effort.

- (3) Legislation be enacted prohibiting the dumping of raw

sewage or industrial wastes into natural or artificial lakes.

- (4) The Commission be relieved of the responsibility for boat inspection and water navigation regulations.

Comment: This more properly belongs in some state service carrying out similar duties.

- (5) Legislation be passed authorizing the use of funds for training of personnel both before and after initial employment.

- (6) Section 107.21, Code 1946, creating three divisions within the Conservation Department be repealed and that responsibility for departmental organization be left with the Commission.

Comment: Divisional organization is a matter of distributing the work load. With an expanding and changing conservation program the Commission should have the power to reorganize the department to meet changing conditions.

- (7) 50 G. A. Chap. 34 be amended to permit habitat improvement by planting of trees, shrubs and other vegetation on private lands.

- (8) The numerous special and local laws regulating the taking of fur bearing mammals and fish be repealed and leave suitable regulations to the Commission under the authority already granted under Section 109.58 and subsequent paragraphs.

Comment: It may be desirable to prepare new legislation carrying certain definitions scattered through these

various acts but even so the law could be greatly simplified.

- (9) Section 107.12, Code 1946, which fixes the salary of the Director and 107.13, Code 1946, which, among other things, fixes a maximum compensation for conservation officers, be amended by striking out the salary fixing provisions of each paragraph.

Comment: It is difficult to build and maintain an efficient staff when the compensations of some are fixed by law and others are not.

- (10) Present legislation be amended to place supervisory control of Commission expenditures and compensation schedules in one agency.

Comment: At the present time there are two agencies legally exercising such control over parts of the operations, namely, the Comptroller and the Executive Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION

It is recommended that -

- (1) There be a clear cut understanding of the relationship between the Governor and the Commission. The Governor should be informed of the operation and programs of the Commission but should not interfere in personnel and operation affairs.

The responsibility for the Conservation program rests primarily with the Commission. ~~The Governor~~ ~~and~~ The Executive Council have the responsibility for reviewing proposed land acquisition programs and compensation paid to employees. It is essential that this right of review be exercised carefully to insure necessary consideration of proposals without undue delay to the overall program. (The many and varied duties imposed on the Executive Council comprised of officials who already have heavy responsibilities causes wonder that time can be found to give consideration to any project).

- (2) The Conservation Commission clearly define its own functions and relationships with its staff, retaining for itself only policy making and review functions.
- (3) The Director outline and clearly define the duties and responsibility of persons occupying each type of position in the staff and that as new positions are established, similar definitions be formulated.
- (4) Qualifications necessary for applicants for each type of position be established and used in the selection

of personnel either for promotion or initial employment.

- (5) The present policy of promotion from within the staff be followed where qualified persons are available but that this policy should be flexible enough to permit the employment of better qualified individuals from other sources.
- (6) Immediate efforts be made to increase the salary scale to a point where qualified personnel can be attracted and held on the staff. (Unless this can be done it will become increasingly difficult to develop and carry out efficiently the expanded program.
- (7) Enough new positions, including technicians (Foresters, biologists and engineers) be established to carry on the studies necessary to provide adequate information for development of projects and to secure more comprehensive data on which the regulation of the annual harvest of fish and game can be based.
- (8) Biological research be continued under the present cooperative unit plan and that the fisheries research be expanded to cover the most immediate and pressing problems.
- (9) The public relations personnel be increased in order to furnish Conservation material to the public schools and to inaugurate a cooperative educational program with school officials and those of other organizations.
- (10) A training program for new employees and "refresher" training for present employees be started. This training should inform employees of, among other things:

- (a) The legal authority and legal limitations under which the Conservation Commission operates.
 - (b) The extent of the work of the Commission and the organization of the staff to carry it out.
 - (c) The duties and responsibilities of the job to which employee is to be assigned.
 - (d) The proper cooperative relationship with other employees, with members of other conservation organizations and with the public.
 - (e) Standards of conduct expected from employees.
 - (f) Special instructions on any methods involved in the job to which he is assigned.
- (11) That the Director establish a system of warning employees whose work is unsatisfactory. This might consist of a statement of the deficiencies in the work, of suggestions of possible ways of improvement along with a specific warning that failure to improve could only result in a recommendation for demotion or dismissal. A record of such warning should be made part of that employee's record with the organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROGRAM

It is recommended that -

- (1) The program for working with sportsmen's groups and Soil Conservation Districts be pushed and adequate technical help be provided to insure maximum conservation advantage from such cooperative efforts.

Comment: Various projects will need assistance from biologists, foresters and engineers and such service should be available where needed.

- (2) As rapidly as possible areas owned by the Commission be treated with such soil conservation methods as are necessary to obtain maximum values from the land and at the same time provide a demonstration of good land and wildlife management.

- (3) In continuing the lake improvement program which is relatively far advanced, dredging should be carried on in additional lakes only after the most careful studies in the light of past experience.

Comments: Data on lakes already dredged and others to be dredged indicate that in some cases other and less expensive methods might accomplish the same results.

- (4) Present studies on streams be continued and that stream improvements be initiated to the extent found feasible.

Comment: In the future the rivers of the state must provide a greater share of the total fishing and other recreational demands.

Such a program should as far as it is possible be integrated with sound soil erosion control programs on adjoining lands if maximum values are to be obtained.

- (5) Studies be made of the feasibility of purchasing overflow lands along the rivers by combining the needs of stream improvement, acquisition of access areas, forestry and partial flood control programs.

Comment: Many states are now purchasing extensive strips of stream bottom lands for one or more of the following purposes: To provide public access to the streams; to give control of the banks for stream bank protection; to permit revegetation and reforestation of eroding areas; to help in flood control; to provide wild life habitat.

- (6) The general forestry program be pushed to bring it up with other phases of the Twenty-five Year plan. This work should among other things, furnish technical assistance to private forest owners, provide proper forest management on state owned forest lands, provide for acquisition of additional lands to block in ownership of established areas, consider the establishment of additional purchase areas and provide for an expansion of the forest nursery to produce several million trees annually for reforestation, windbreaks and wildlife plantings.

- (7) Increased efforts be made to promote closer working relationship with those living on the land. The cooperative program with soil conservation districts and

sportsman Clubs for the development of wildlife habitat and the enlarged forestry program suggested represent the greatest apparent opportunity now available to accomplish this purpose and increase wildlife production.

- (8) That fishery management programs be frankly tied closely to the development of farm ponds and new artificial lakes, the restoration of natural lakes, the abatement of pollution, stream improvement and soil erosion control.

Comments: It should be recognized that the success of these basic programs furnishes the only possible chance to increase present fish production.

Note: The recommendations on programs have been confined to those elements of the Twenty-five Year conservation plan that have not progressed as rapidly as others. The fact that such items as parks, the artificial lake program, the restoration of natural lakes and marshes and similar well advanced programs are not given prominence does not imply that these programs are not important. They should be continued along present lines.

The Committee suggests, with the concurrence of Dr. Gabrielson, that it be continued for the purpose of following through on the recommendations in this report.

A meeting was held by the Governor's Conservation Study Committee and Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, engaged in a similar study for the Conservation Commission at Des Moines on December 18, 1947.

After due consideration it was agreed to present a joint report with a copy each to Governor Robert D. Blue and the Conservation Commission.

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February 20, 1948

Mr. Fred Poyneer
Cedar Rapids
Iowa

Dear Fred:

Let me say that I enjoyed very much the conversation I had with you and the other members of the Commission on my last visit to Des Moines. It was a pleasure indeed to meet with you and the other members, all of whom impressed me as being very sincere and earnest in their conservation efforts.

I would like to repeat that the most serious problem that your Commission has to face is the one of low salary scales which are governed by general laws. It is going to be increasingly impossible for you to compete with other Commissions and conservation agencies in bidding for the services of competent men in that field. I know that a number of Commissions have recently raised their salary scales and others are being forced to do so. I am sure that you cannot solve your problems without a similar adjustment in rates of pay.

It was a pleasure to work with your Commission. I have always had a general feeling just from watching your work and reports from Iowa that it was doing an excellent job and that it was one of the best setups in the United States. My recent investigation only confirmed that feeling. As I stated in the report, I think that the work has been outstanding and Iowa has every reason to be proud of the accomplishments to date. The fact that I was critical of some phases of the work does not indicate anything but a desire to make suggestions for improving an already grand job.

Kindest personal regards.

Sincerely,



Ira N. Gabrielson
President

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