

Remarks prepared for the dedication of the Schmeeckle Interpretive Forest Trail on occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Trees For Tomorrow. October 17, 1984

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I am pleased to take part in to-day's festivities. Particularly in honoring an old and deserving friend whom I knew many years before my 23 years of employment (1946-1969) as chief forester of Trees for Tomorrow. While my responsibilities were not with the camp but the land owner assistance program, I had many contacts with Fred Schmeeckle over the years both at Trees Camp and in the field working with reforestation projects.

Fred Schmeeckle (1893-1967) was an environmental visionary long before the word environment became a standard in our vocabulary. A Nebraska native, he came to Wisconsin in 1923 to teach agriculture at the Stevens Point State Normal School. Prior to that he taught high school agriculture and received his under-graduate education in that state. His graduate degree in Vocational Education was taken at the University of Minnesota. Early in his teaching career he realized that something must be done to make people understand the world about them, if a stop was to be made in the destruction of natural resources he saw about him. He chose to do this by education and soon incorporated a unit in conservation of natural resources in his agriculture teaching. In the late 1930's he was teaching a full course in conservation. This evolved, in 1946, into the establishment of the first major in Conservation Education in the United States. With the hiring of Dr. Bernard Wievel and my brother, the late Dr. Walter Sylvester in 1947 with the unqualified support of the college president, the late Wm. C. Hansen, the program got underway. Over the years this has developed into the largest under-graduate natural resources program in the United States -- The College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point.

Mr first contact with Fred came in the late 1930's and early 1940's. At that time I was employed by the Wisconsin Conservation Department as a cooperative forest ranger, working the 11 counties of central and east central Wisconsin. Part of the responsibilities of that position were working with local schools implementing forest fire prevention programs.

Fred always believed that the more his students came in contact with the "real world the better teachers they would be. In 1942 I helped him organize a field trip to the Northern State Forest and the Trout Lake Station in Vilas County. The group picked me up at Merrill in a relatively new over-the-road bus. The day before I had to write a letter of justification to the State Bureau of Purchases for the purchase of 50 one cent postcards. On seeing that bus, I thought the College was living in the best of all worlds. Later it developed that Fred needed a bus for field trips and the only way he could get one was to loan the College the money for its purchase and be repaid through user fees. If you really believe in something, one can find a way.

As a lecturer he was in constant demand. His enthusiasm for conservation always permeated his audiences. In 1952, for example, he spoke to 65 groups.

After Mully Taylor accepted the suggestion of Vico Isola, then Assistant Regional Forester for Information and Education for Region 9 of the U. S. Forest Service, to operate the Forest Service Training Center at Eagle River as a Conservation Camp, Fred Schmeckle became an active participant in the "Trees" program. Starting with the first workshop for school administrators in 1945, he preached the Trees for Tomorrow "gospel" through out the rest of his teaching career and into retirement at Eagle River.

He was an avid outdoors man, spending much of his time fishing, hunting, landscape gardening and developed a special interest in reforestation and soil conservation.

Among the many projects he was involved with were:

- the first legislation requiring the teaching of conservation in Wisconsin schools.
- establishment of the Conservation Education Association.
- establishment of both the Boston School Forest and the Izaak Walton Forests in Portage County.
- He was a member of the Portage County Park Commission.
- Many many high school workshops at Trees For Tomorrow.

Fred was a member of the Advisory Board of Trees Camp and its chairman several times from 1945 until his death in 1967.

The 236 acre Schmeekle Reserve, an outdoor education laboratory, at the U. W. Stevens Point is named in his honor..

In 1946, when starting my Trees For Tomorrow employment, I sought his advice in laying out and signing the forest trail we are naming for him to-day.

Fred Schmeekle's work in conservation education not only made people aware of the eroding natural resources of our state, but gave him a lasting reputation in the field of resource management. He was more than a teacher --He taught by leading a life of practicing what he preached.