

Wetlands Acquisition

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Wisconsin has taken a big forward stride in land acquisition, made possible by license fee increases. Here's the story, including a brief historical review.

In February of this year an important step was taken by the Conservation Commission in protecting valuable Wisconsin wetland resources. At that time the commission approved 108 options in the amount of \$339,330.17 located on 24 projects throughout the state.

Also, the department was given approval to begin acquisition on 10 new wetland projects encompassing some 31,037 acres and to extend boundaries on 12 established projects to include an additional 10,364 acres. Estimated costs of acquiring land on new projects and within boundary extensions are \$1,395,245.

The conference room on the eighth floor of the State Office Building in Madison was filled with interested conservationists at the February meeting. Numerous individuals appeared either in favor of specific projects or endorsing the program in toto. Favorable publicity emitted from the press and over the radio and TV waves.

COMMISSION action in February culminated a series of events covering more than three decades. In the late 1920's, the Legislature recognized the wisdom of state ownership and restoration of the once tremendously productive wildlife marsh at Horicon by appropriating funds for its acquisition and development. Acquisition on Horicon, however, faltered during the depression and it was not until the 1940's that state ownership was largely completed.

During intervening years, scant attention was paid to the necessity for acquisition of other wetland areas in Wisconsin. The economy was practically at a

standstill. Agricultural expansion into wildlife marshes was insignificant. In fact, populations of many wildlife species during this era were the highest in man's experience. Prairie grouse, deer and pheasants were notably abundant. Land posting was a minor problem. Sportsmen were more concerned over the price of shells than a place in which to hunt.

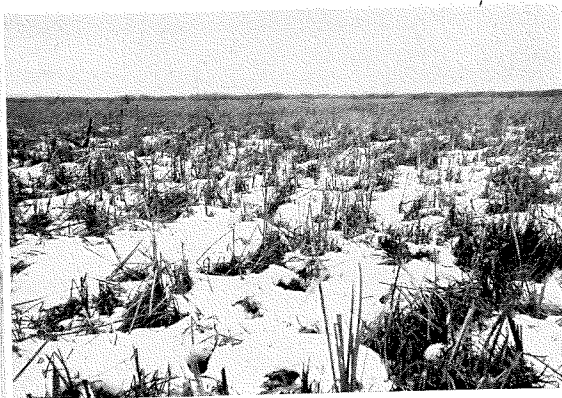
With the advent of World War II, tremendous changes in the landscape began to occur in Wisconsin. The economic pace of the nation rapidly accelerated. Civilian and military populations demanded agricultural products in large quantities. Inevitable drainage of wetlands followed to supply the agricultural products necessary to a total war effort. High prices and liberal governmental subsidies made drainage economically attractive.

V-E AND V-J days did not end the process. Continued price supports, subsidies and governmental technical assistance on drainage destroyed many additional wetland areas. Wisconsin, once richly blessed with wetland resources, was rapidly becoming a wetland-poor state.

Termination of the Korean war saw the slow deacceleration of drainage efforts. Direct government subsidies for drainage in Wisconsin were discontinued. Agricultural price supports were continued, but at reduced levels. Although these economic forces have slowed drainage, it has by no means been discontinued. On the contrary, drainage is still going on, especially in the richer agricultural counties of Wisconsin. In



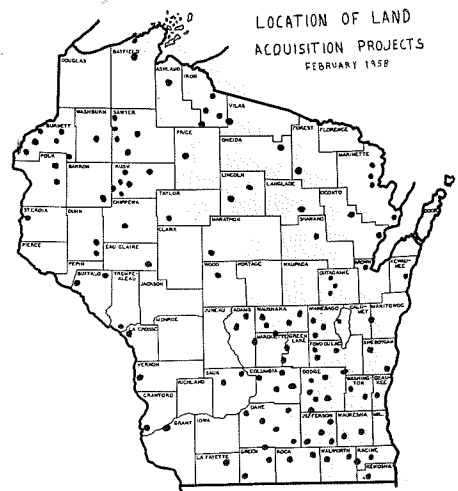
Powell marsh, Vilas county: A large wetland being developed for geese.



McMillan marsh, Marathon county: One of the few large wetlands hereabouts.



Rome mill pond, Jefferson county: Wildlife area approved for purchase in 1957.

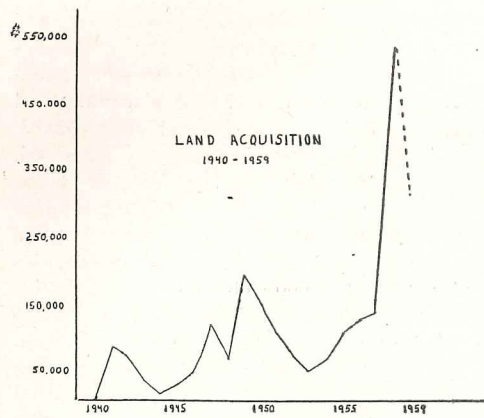


these counties the majority of the important wetland areas will be progressively put to other uses.

Available records and department surveys indicate that more than 900,000 acres of land were in organized drainage from 1906 to 1940. Drainage subsidies between 1941 and 1953 reached one out of every four farms in Wisconsin and affected 1,692,750 acres. Total figures indicate that more than 2½ million acres of Wisconsin wetlands have been affected by drainage. These data, moreover, are incomplete as they do not include the small private drainage by landowners working independently.

Wildlife and marshes are practically inseparable. Many important species—otter, beaver, mink, muskrat, raccoon, pheasants, rabbits, ducks, geese, coot, woodcock, Wilson snipe, to name the more prominent—depend at least in part on wet places in which to live. Without wetlands many kinds of wildlife cease to exist. In areas of intensive agricultural activity, the few remaining wet pockets of vegetation represent the last remaining stable wildlife habitat.

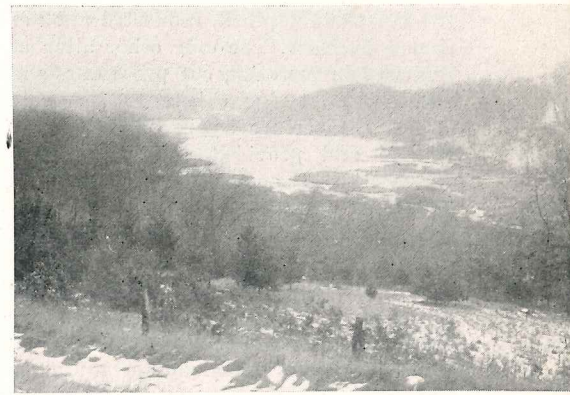
A public hunting grounds program of lease and acquisition was approved by the Legislature in 1937 with the passage of the Voluntary Sportsmen's License



bill which provided funds. In 1943, the Legislature again recognized the wisdom of an acquisition program and gave it an additional push by earmarking of funds from the sale of resident hunting licenses for leasing and purchasing lands. This same Legislature passed a measure which earmarked 50 cents of each deer license for acquisition of deer yards and deer feeding.

Thus, in the early forties the department began a purchase program. Funds were used initially for purchase of Horicon marsh and northern deer yards. Surplus funds which accumulated during the war years were largely spent by 1949. During the next four years acquisition funds were sharply curtailed. The department, faced with a continuing inflation and fixed license fees, found it more difficult to make ends meet. Legislative approval of increased license fees in 1952 turned the land acquisition curve upwards again. By 1957 around \$141,000 was budgeted for lands. Most of this money was going into wetland projects throughout the state. Deer yard acquisition was slowed down because the more important deer yards were already located on public forest lands and the department was able to negotiate cooperative agreements with forestry agencies for their management.

By 1956, the department, pressed with many new programs and again feeling



Mecan springs, Waushara county: The water provides a resting area for the Greenwood goose flock.



Potato creek, Rusk county: This area will be improved for aquatic wildlife.



Honey creek, Racine county: Aquatic wildlife habitat presently exists here.

the inflationary pinch, requested another license increase. The only other alternative was to retrench, cut programs, and reduce land budgets. The 1957 session of the Legislature approved license increases and provided additional funds for wetlands acquisition. A biennial budget of \$480,000 for land was established. In the first year of the period, the present fiscal year, options were obtained which exceeded the budget. The commission then requested the State Emergency Board to allot an additional \$360,000 of license money for wetlands. Favorable action by the Emergency Board made it possible for game managers throughout Wisconsin to begin negotiations for land on established and new projects. By February the additional allotment was obligated and presented to the commission for action.

An accompanying table summarizes February Conservation Commission ac-

tion on options. Most of this expenditure will be financed under the Pittman-Robertson program whereby three-fourths of the initial cost is reimbursed to the state by the federal government.

This, however, is by no means the entire story. The total number of established acquisition projects in Wisconsin is now 130. On these projects 151,806 acres of land have been purchased costing \$2,028,210.00. These data do not include more than 304,000 acres of leased public hunting and fishing grounds. Public forest land ownership, private forest crop land and State Land Commission land in Wisconsin bring the total acreage of land open to public hunting to almost five million acres. Wisconsin sportsmen are indeed richly blessed with recreational opportunities.

The program during the next fiscal year will not reach the intensity of this year. Game management expects to spend

OPTIONS ON ESTABLISHED AND NEW WETLAND
PROJECTS—APPROVED FEBRUARY, 1958

Project	County	Acres Optioned	Price
Allenton Marsh	Washington	53.02	\$ 3,700.00
Amsterdam Sloughs*	Burnett	2,827.23	5,654.46
Augusta	Eau Claire	40.00	610.00
Big Swamp	Buffalo	75.50	632.50
Blue River*	Grant	477.00	4,310.00
Crex Meadows	Burnett	1,237.38	4,547.68
Eldorado Marsh	Fond du Lac	690.63	50,475.00
Fish Lake	Burnett	1,820.00	16,627.53
Germania Marsh	Marquette	124.40	2,720.00
Honey Creek*	Racine	354.50	18,456.00
Jackson Marsh	Washington	434.00	27,995.00
Mud Lake	Dodge	519.00	51,765.00
Navarino Marsh	Shawano	371.05	4,965.00
Pensaukee	Oconto	265.33	19,810.00
Peshtigo Harbor	Marinette	1,043.14	40,647.00
Pine Island	Columbia	350.95	11,500.00
Potato Creek*	Rusk	172.00	4,350.00
Powell Marsh	Vilas	505.90	10,625.00
Rice Beds Creek	Polk	44.98	400.00
Rome Pond	Jefferson	400.00	13,900.00
Theresa Marsh	Washington	316.50	22,175.00
Tichigan	Racine	264.30	17,000.00
Washington Creek	Rusk	20.00	85.00
Wood County*	Wood	319.00	6,380.00
TOTAL		12,725.81	\$339,330.17

* New project.

approximately \$310,000 for wetlands acquisition and fish management more than \$200,000 for waterway and spring-head acquisition. Several new wetland projects will be contemplated. Emphasis will be placed on completing acquisition on established projects. Additional study will be made of the problems involved in

the small but highly critical wetland areas in southeastern Wisconsin.

One of the most significant statements on wetlands was made by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission at their December 1957 meeting when they adopted a revised wetlands preservation, restoration and management policy. The policy,

AMENDMENTS TO ESTABLISHED PROJECTS—APPROVED FEBRUARY, 1958
(The State Currently Owns 36,056 Acres on These Projects)

Project	County	Acres	Price
Allenton Marsh Required for development of entire marsh.	Washington	30	\$ 3,000.00
Big Swamp Blocks in the last remaining major wetland in the county.	Buffalo	418	9,350.00
Crex Meadows A major increase of valuable wetlands which when flowed, will permit better management of 18,345 acres presently state-owned.	Burnett	4,878	27,600.00
Eldorado Marsh Development of this area for aquatic game and for public hunting requires additional land.	Fond du Lac	806	128,641.00
Fish Lake A minor increase to permit flowing of wetlands.	Burnett	80	1,050.00
Jackson Marsh Required to preserve existing wetland, for flowing and to provide public hunting in a heavily populated region of Wisconsin.	Washington	1,948	108,240.00
Kiezer Lake Required for diver-duck management.	Burnett	647	10,365.00
Pensaukee Marsh Provides additional frontage on Green Bay.	Oconto	32	3,900.00
Peshtigo Harbor Will provide additional lands for flowing, access and upland game development.	Marinette	220	15,100.00
Pine Island Needed to permit development of fields for geese and public lands on north side of Wisconsin River.	Columbia	705	31,407.00
Powell Marsh Additional lands needed for goose management.	Vilas	400	13,765.00
Rome Pond To provide access to the southern boundary and to preserve existing marshland.	Jefferson	200	5,500.00
TOTALS		10,364	\$357,918.00

NEW ACQUISITION PROJECTS—APPROVED FEBRUARY, 1958

Project	County	Acres	Estimated Cost
Amsterdam Sloughs A low-cost wetland in the northwest which will be developed for aquatic, forest and prairie grouse.	Burnett	5,126	\$ 38,605.00
Blue River This area lies along the Wisconsin River; will provide public hunting, fishing and trapping and will preserve a lower Wisconsin River valley wildland type.	Grant	6,021	85,000.00
Grand River One of the largest and best remaining large wetland areas in east central Wisconsin. The area will be developed for aquatic and upland game and may become a major goose area.	Green Lake	7,634	397,510.00
Honey Creek Three purchase units which will preserve existing wetlands and provide public hunting in this populous region.	Racine	1,711	146,000.00
Lima Marsh A large wetland important for public hunting and preservation of upland and aquatic game habitat.	Rock	2,221	221,000.00
McMillan Marsh One of the few large wetlands in central Wisconsin. It will be developed for aquatic, upland, and prairie game, and will provide public hunting.	Marathon	5,605	63,766.00
Potato Creek A small but potentially good wetland which will be flowed for aquatic game.	Rusk	620	9,925.00
Shaw Marsh A small wetland area in a populated region which will preserve wildlife habitat and provide public hunting.	Dodge	800	25,200.00
Waunakee Marsh A small but excellent wetland near Madison which will provide public hunting and wildlife habitat.	Dane	979	43,941.00
Wood County A small purchase to fit in with management of 18,632 acres of county-leased land and also for water diversion to the 57,000-acre Meadow Valley unit of CWCA.	Wood	319	6,380.00
TOTAL		31,036	\$1,037,327.00

which is reproduced in its entirety with this article, recognizes that no single approach to wetlands conservation is possible. The statement strongly endorses all other programs which will aid in wetland conservation. Furthermore, full recognition is given to the fact that the

assistance of many citizens and groups in Wisconsin will be necessary to maintain the tremendously valuable wetland resources of Wisconsin. Wetlands acquisition has been given an excellent start. Much remains yet to be done. The commission's policy points the direction.

POLICY ON WETLAND PRESERVATION, RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT

(Adopted by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission December 13, 1957)

The Wisconsin statutes declare that it is the duty of the Conservation Commission to "conserve the fish and game supply, and insure to the citizens of this state continued opportunities for good fishing, hunting and trapping" (Section 29.174). Under the Conservation Act, the Commission also is to encourage the establishment of "an adequate and flexible system for the protection, development, and use of forests, fish and game, lakes, streams, plant life, flowers, and other outdoor resources in the State of Wisconsin" (Section 23.09).

The Conservation Commission now deems it prudent to restate and amplify its policy adopted on June 10, 1955, on wetland preservation and management.

A wetland is defined as an area of land presently wet, or an area formerly wet which may be planned for restoration, often containing organic soils, and having the water table at, near, or above the land surface.

It is the policy of the Conservation Commission to recognize and endorse the following statements regarding Wisconsin's wetlands:

That the wetlands of Wisconsin are a tremendously valuable natural resource which must be managed carefully because they often contain valuable soils for agriculture, when undrained often support irreplaceable wildlife cover and play an important part in stabilization of water resources, and contribute materially to the over-all well-being of its citizens;

That the undrained wetlands of the southeastern portion of Wisconsin because they are located in the region of greatest human pressure are generally more important and critical wildlife habitat than undrained wetlands located in other regions of the state. However, the Conservation Commission recognizes fully the value of undrained wetlands in all parts of Wisconsin;

That preservation and management of wetlands for wildlife is a high use in those areas where wildlife is becoming a scarce resource;

That drainage of some wetlands in Wisconsin has been economically sound and that some limited additional wetland drainage may be necessary and desirable to encourage the highest economic land use commensurate with human needs; however, drained wetlands containing organic soils which deteriorate rapidly under cultivation, should be scientifically managed to insure a continuation of the highest possible economic level of production including wildlife.

It is also the policy of the Conservation Commission to endorse the following programs and practices which will help to accomplish the best possible use of Wisconsin's wetland resources:

1. Make available to all interested groups and agencies the Conservation Department wetlands survey.

2. Encourage private preservation and management of undrained wetlands, and

restoration of drained wetlands, for forests, fur farming, fish and wildlife production.

3. Maintain and improve undrained wetlands, restore drained wetlands and support those programs and practices of the United States Department of Agriculture which help to accomplish these objectives.

4. Encourage the deferment of agricultural production of undrained private wetlands until the need for such production is necessary.

5. Cooperate with all local, state and national agencies and committees concerned with wetlands management to achieve the best over-all use consistent with esthetic and material needs.

6. Encourage the development and continual evaluation of criteria which can be used by all groups for the management of wetlands.

7. Oppose wetland drainage through government cost-sharing programs designed to bring new land into agricultural crop production and urge that agricultural program incentives be used to restore drained wetlands and preserve and improve undrained wetlands.

8. Investigate the drainage of any wetlands which adversely affect navigable waters, forest or wildlife and take what-

ever action is possible to prevent or reduce damage to those resources.

9. Pursue a vigorous program of wetlands acquisition which shall include the purchase or leasing of blocks of wetlands, or key parcels in primary wetland areas, and the development of a system for the preservation of small wetland areas. On projects of comparable merit, the Conservation Commission will give priority to acquisition when local support is given by the following actions:

- (a) Financial contributions, gifts of land and donations of time, labor, equipment and materials by local units of government and local groups and individuals;
- (b) Adoption of zoning ordinances, including wetland conservancy districts which provide for adequate protection of forest, water and wildlife resources. The Conservation Commission encourages wetland conservancy district zoning and offers full cooperation to all groups in the development of zoning ordinances.

The Conservation Commission supports the enactment of any legislation designed to achieve the goals set forth in this policy statement.

"The Mad Race for Water Utilization"

Water development projects of today and for the future must have as their objectives the serving of all water needs. Single purpose projects which ignore other needs are extravagant users of water, and our potential water supply does not have a margin for extravagance. . . .

A good example of a resource whose needs have steadily been neglected in the mad race for water utilization and development is fish and wildlife. . . . Unless water use for fish and wildlife becomes a purpose of tomorrow's water development projects, much of this particular resource is going to end up stranded—high and dry.—D. H. JANZEN, director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service