

Report of Staff Trip
to Inspect Timber Cuttings on State Land

On September 20-22, inclusive, members of the department staff including Mr. Lovejoy, Mr. Sayre, Mr. Paquin, Mr. Schaff, Mr. Strusaker, Mr. Ruhl, Mr. McIntire, and myself made a trip to the northern part of the Lower Peninsula. The purpose of the trip was to inspect timber cuttings made on state land with the idea of recommending a more liberal timber sales policy.

The problem was presented to the group at a meeting in the Director's office before leaving for the field. From that and subsequent discussions I deducted that the present action was the result of Mr. Lovejoy's concern about the forest closing in and favoring timber production rather than game production and the concern of the Commission Chairman regarding the possibility of the next Knox bill or similar bill passing the legislature if the land and timber resources were not carefully managed by the department. This stand seemed to be greatly strengthened by the fact that the state-owned acreage will be approximately doubled after November first when about two and a half million acres will revert through tax delinquency.

The discussion in the Director's office brought out the fact that if a more liberal policy were decided on there were at least two ways of handling it. The first and one applied to a limited extent by the Forestry Division is to continue the present policy on unadministered lands and to gradually and carefully work into a policy on administered lands with the division charged with the responsibility of administering the lands directing the program. The other method was to start now on a carefully planned educational program to prepare the public and especially the outdoor editors for a change in policy which would be decided by Commission action at some future time.

The first stop on the trip was to inspect a Forestry Division sale on the Houghton Lake State Forest. This operation was one of many small sales carried on by that division on their forests. It consisted of removing dead and dead topped trees from a stand of mixed swamp conifers. Such operations were handled by the forest supervisor on application from the operator. Each operator is limited to one forty-acre unit; however, if that operation is satisfactorily completed he is permitted to make application for another cutting permit. The sales are made on the basis of stumpage values and all materials are scaled and/or counted by the forest supervisor and must be paid for before they are removed from the area.

The staff agreed that this operation which was completed last winter was more in the nature of a salvage operation designed to save the dead and overmature timber and probably had improved condition for the remaining stand and for reproduction. From a game standpoint the stand was also considered to be improved because the reproduction expected following the cutting would be more beneficial to game than the practically mature original stand.

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The next stop was at the Game Division cuttings on the south side of the Bear Swamp on the Hanson Refuge. On this area alternate $2\frac{1}{2}$ -acre blocks were cut to leave 500 to 750 stems per acre. The part of the area inspected was cut during the winter of 1937-38 as a part of the deer browse release cuttings. Considerable ground cover, mostly grasses, has come in due to the reduced amount of shade, and some hardwood species are apparently coming in that will produce deer feed which was the objective when the area was cut. Closer examination disclosed that coniferous reproduction is also heavy.

The group discussed the cutting specifications applied to the area and the possibility of these specifications being desirable for application to other areas. However, experience with specifications of this kind shows that they are not practical for private operations on state land unless the trees to be taken out are marked. Marking increases the overhead considerably and if other specifications equally as good and involving less overhead can be found, they would be more desirable.

The next stop was the west side of the Hanson Refuge. The area inspected included two five-acre plots that were clear cut as part of a deer browse release cutting during the winter of 1935-36. The centers of these plots were practically taken over by a heavy grass ground cover; however, some hardwood reproduction also was showing up through the grass. Along the edges of the alternate plots that were left uncut coniferous seedlings were coming up very thick. The original stand in this area was almost a clear stand of conifers with cedar predominating, but as far as coniferous reproduction is concerned the centers of these clear cut plots gave results that were almost completely negative.

After this stop the group drove to Pigeon River and spent the night at the Pigeon River Forest Headquarters.

The next morning inspections were made of two cuttings on the Pigeon River area by C.C.C. Both of these operations were in hardwood and the salvage materials removed were cord wood for use as C.C.C. camp fuel. These cuttings had for the most part removed an overstory of cull hardwoods that were left when the area was lumbered originally. The staff agreed that such operations were probably more beneficial than detrimental when all of the potential resources of the area were considered.

On both of these stops stands of hardwood second growth were inspected and their ultimate use discussed. A large percentage of these stands were made up of sprout growth rather than seedling trees and the question of whether or not marketable saw timber could be expected from such trees was brought up. No one was able to answer the question, but the evidence at hand showed that a considerable volume of cord wood could be produced from such stands. Considerable discussion centered about the available market for the class of timber that the state has to offer, and whether or not market conditions should influence the state timber sales policy.

The next inspection was of a cutting made by a private operator on the Pigeon River Forest. This operation was practically a clear cutting. Only the trees that had little or no commercial value were left standing. This was a comparatively recent operation, but hardwood reproduction was coming up and gave evidence that another good hardwood stand would soon cover the area.

From the Pigeon River Area the group drove through a section of Emmet County where the state expects to have a good blocking of state-owned land after November 1 when tax delinquent lands revert to state ownership. The question for consideration here was whether or not this area should be dedicated as a state project. The group seemed to be of the opinion that this area had as many potentialities as the Hardwood State Forest or more. However, some members of the staff were hesitant about recommending the dedication of the area because of the higher overhead costs on state administered projects.

After this inspection the group drove to Mio where we met the Huron National Forest supervisor and the ranger for that district. With them as guides we inspected some timber sales on the national forest. The first stop was at a location where jack pine pulp had been cut in 1935. Part of this area had been disk-harrowed before the cutting was done in an effort to encourage reproduction. This effort was showing no appreciable results except where jack pine seed had been sowed after disking. Other types of seeding such as scattering the slash with the cones over the disk area and natural seeding had largely failed. A sufficient number of seed trees had been left and another stand will probably result when conditions favoring reproduction such as fire, good seed year, etc., occur.

Two other jack pine cuttings were inspected including an operation that was being worked at that time. The ranger explained the Forest Service method of handling the sales and told the price they were receiving for stumpage and their responsibility and the responsibility of the operator. The timber is sold at a stumpage rate which for that particular sale was \$1.15 per cord. The operator is also responsible for the slash disposal for which he ~~pays~~ fifty cents per cord. At the conclusion of the cutting the Forest Service hires men from the fund created by the slash disposal fee and disposes of the slash.

The group was of the opinion that cuttings of this nature were probably alright from a silvicultural standpoint and that they were probably beneficial from a game standpoint because they encouraged an uneven aged stand over the forest area as well as openings.

The next day the group made its first stop at the Ogemaw Refuge where we inspected a mature or nearly mature stand of jack pine and a very thick immature stand of jack pine. Everyone agreed that the mature stand could and probably should be cut. However, most members of the group were of the opinion that the state-owned acreage of this type of timber was too small to be of much importance. The immature stand had very little merchantable volume and practically all agreed that it should be left.

The next stop was at the Ogemaw Forest in a stand of oak underplanted with white pine. The oak was of the size with some saw timber and the pine was approximately 12 to 15 feet tall. Here the discussion centered around whether or not the oak should be cut out of this stand. The Forestry Division believed it should be left and the Game Division raised a question about whether the stand was not more valuable for game with the oak left.

The next and last stop was at a stand of poplar on the Molasses River Area. Everyone agreed that with few exceptions poplar could be cut whenever there was a market for it.

Few decisions were reached as a result of the trip; however, I believe the consensus of opinion was that the problem was not of great immediate concern, but that it was due to gain magnitude as time passed and that considerable thought should be put on it so that when action was necessary a carefully preconceived plan could be put into effect. Mr. Lovejoy was of the opinion that action should be taken in the near future so that the department could demonstrate that the timber resources on state lands were to be managed and not held as frozen assets. He also stressed the rapid change taking place in the forests of the state principally in the direction of closed canopy in timber stands that was killing out the ground cover and that openings were disappearing.

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