

CHAPTER II - WHAT THE CCC DID FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The great adventure of American youth in conservation of natural resources ended on June 30, 1942. It lasted for nine and one-third years -- less than a decade. In that short time the Civilian Conservation Corps wrote its name into the economic, social, and educational history of this country; it did even more than that -- it started a change in the landscape of a Nation. Obviously, the neglect, waste and destruction of many generations could not be repaired or restored in a decade, but a heartening start has been made by the CCC. Maybe CCC has taught America a lesson in real national thrift, which is another name for conservation of natural resources.

Although a global war was not in the National picture when CCC started, by 1939 National Defense had come in, and by 1941 War had entered. Conservation of natural resources is important to a nation at all times but in days of war, it is vital. As Dr. Hugh Bennett has recently said -- "Before the war is over, Hitler will know that conservation was one of the weapons we used to wreck him."

The CCC did not come any too soon. It shoved forward the conservation of our natural resources by many years; there is still need for such an agency, and when war ceases, the need will be increased tenfold.

The conservation picture of this country has for too long been a dark one. That picture was strikingly painted in 1940 by Henry A. Wallace, now Vice-President, then Secretary of Agriculture, in these words:

Thoughtlessly we have destroyed or wounded a considerable part of our common wealth in this country. We have ripped open and to some extent devitalized more than half of all the land in the United States. We have slashed down forests and loosed floods upon ourselves. We have torn up grassland and left the earth to blow away. We have shallowed and befouled our creeks, rivers, and other living waters. We have built great reservoirs and power plants and let them be crippled with silt and debris, long before they have been paid for.

Out of a realization of the waste of natural resources and of the waste of idle youth, President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 combined the two into one of the most constructive programs this country has ever witnessed. He had long been convinced of the urgent need to check the heedless waste of our natural resources, and when the depression furnished idle man power, he seized the opportunity to remedy both. It was a bold stroke of conservation statesmanship. However, it was obvious that

Franklin Roosevelt had given much thought to this use of idle labor in the cause of the country's natural resources. It was no overnight idea, for even in March 1933, less than a month in the White House, he surprised a group of less imaginative foresters, park executives, naturalists, and conservationists with details of what kinds of forest, soils, park, and stream improvement work should be done, by sketching for them a specific organization chart. After the announcement of these advance plans, he wanted action -- immediate action; he got it. In less than three weeks after Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Act of March 31, 1933, the first CCC camp was set up and working in the George Washington National Forest in Virginia. By July 15, 1933, there were 300,000 youths and veterans at work for natural resources, and by September 1935, there were over 500,000 CCC in camps in every state and in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

PRACTICAL EDUCATION
THROUGH CONSERVATION WORK

The Civilian Conservation Corps charted more than a gigantic program of conservation of the natural or renewable resources of this country. It charted effective cooperation between four executive departments; it charted a plan to help youth by the most effective and practical method -- to give it worthwhile outdoor work to do, to require an honest day's work of each youth; with no semblance of the dole or "made work." And it should be emphasized that the CCC returned to the American people fair value for what the people paid these youths and veterans. It was healthful work in the outdoors, out in the forests, parks, and soils of this country. As Dr. Paul T. Davis says in "Youth and the Future" (American Youth Commission) -- "The physical organization and character of the CCC has been determined from the first by the nature of the work to be done. Conservation work cannot be done in a workshop; it has to be carried on at the points where the natural resources in need of conservation are located."

The CCC set a new pattern for the most practical kind of education for youth yet found in this country; it gave youth serious, worthwhile outdoor jobs to do -- real work day by day -- jobs which had to follow blueprints and specifications, jobs which when done were inspected and had to stand up. It was not only the finest kind of education for any and every American youth but it was the finest kind of training in citizenship. It was essentially public service work. The Corps set a pattern in the practical teaching of youth which is going to have far-reaching effect on the American system of education; it was education through daily conservation work; it was learning-by-doing. The CCC between 1933 and 1942 proved this pattern was workable.

WHAT THE CCC DID
FOR CONSERVATION

The average American was a strong supporter of the CCC but because of the tremendous scope of CCC operations he did not and could not have full knowledge of what the CCC actually did for the conservation of his country's resources or what it actually did for youth. The variety of work was great and total accomplishments were stupendous. The job lists and the statistics were staggering but without interpretation meant little to the average citizen.

The CCC left the Nation a vastly improved natural resources balance sheet which carried such items on the asset side as three billion of trees planted, 125,000 miles of truck trails built, 89,000 miles of telephone lines, 800 new state parks developed, 40,000,000 acres of farm lands benefited through erosion control, and the rehabilitation of drainage ditches, better grazing conditions on the public domain and an increasing wildlife population. The present and future value of the work completed was estimated as having a present and future value of \$2,000,000,000.

When the CCC was liquidated, what did the figures on conservation accomplishments mean in terms of national security, national welfare and the future? The truck trails built, the fire towers erected, the telephone lines laid and the fire prevention and fire hazard removal work completed meant that on June 30, 1942 the United States had a far stronger forest fire prevention and suppression system than this country had ever had before. It meant that a time when the Nation faced possible incendiary bombing attacks on its vital forest resources, the country had the truck trails, the fire towers and the communication systems necessary to combat them. The erosion control work done in the dust bowl and on southern, middle western, and western lands meant that at a time when the Nation's food production machinery was being taxed to capacity, it had 40,000,000 acres capable of producing much more food than would have been the case if the Corps had not been organized. It meant that the West, which produces the bulk of the beef, wool, and hides needed for victory, had more water and more grass because of the CCC grazing control and water conservation operations.

The trees planted by the Corps meant that about two and one half million acres of lands which were bare and unproductive ten years ago are now green with growing trees planted by the youngsters of the Corps. The millions of man-days spent by CCC enrollees on the forest fire front lines in years past mean that today this country has millions of acres of growing and mature timber which otherwise would have been destroyed. The work done on park lands means that the capacity of

our recreational areas to accommodate visitors had been increased by millions.

Let us look in detail at some of these conservation results from the CCC. The CCC put in 6,459,403 man-days on fighting forest fires. What do all these days of work mean. They mean, among other things, the hardest kind of work, they mean danger from falling limbs and burning snags, or being surrounded by fire -- and perhaps burned to death -- as 42 CCC enrollees and 5 foremen were. It means fighting forest fires hour in and hour out, day and night. It means that the mere boys of the CCC fought fire on a thousand fronts, to save vital American resources badly needed right now in the World War. The annual fire loss in America's forests dropped materially when the CCC got out in the forests. They saved forests for human needs, from going up in smoke and flame; the records of both the U. S. Forest Service and the National Park Service show this.

The CCC boys set out some 2-1/3 billion tree seedlings. What does the planting out of 2,355,587,000 young trees mean. It means for one thing that over 2½ million acres of otherwise barren, denuded, or unproductive land now has a chance to grow timber for human needs, or for human enjoyment, or to help stop valuable soil from washing away, or to shelter and protect wildlife. Many of these young trees will be ready to harvest by the sons of these CCC kids. Trees grow slowly; the CCC was planting for the future. It also means that the seed from which these young trees sprang had to be collected and sown in forest nurseries, and the CCC spent 6,111,258 man-days in preparing land, sowing seed, weeding, transplanting, watering, and tending these 2 billion young trees before they were ready to be set out on the 2 million acres. Many millions of denuded acres yet remain to be planted, to make them productive. And back of all this, the CCC had to collect 375,970 bushels of conifer seed and 13,634,415 pounds of hardwood and other seed to plant in the nurseries to grow the seedlings to plant on the barren soils.

Also, the forests on some 4 million acres have been improved and bettered by having the poorer, crooked, diseased trees cut and taken out, thus giving more light and moisture to the trees remaining. This is a permanent improvement, a real forestry investment; it is called "timber stand improvement." The material removed went into fuel wood, poles, fence posts, guard posts, and charcoal. Foresters supervised this stand improvement. At least 4 million acres of American forests are in better condition because of the CCC boys.

The boys built 126,230 miles of truck trails or minor or forest roads, and in addition, they maintained 580,995 miles. What good did all these miles of road do. It helped fire crews to get to forest fires while they were still small and while there was a chance to stop them, or put

