

A Nation-Wide System of Parks – 1939

Narrator: In 1933, the chief concern of the American government was to break the back of a bad depression. Among the conditions to be remedied were two President Roosevelt recognized at once: employment for hundreds of thousands of young men and war veterans was imperative; havoc wrought by soil erosion had long since shown the necessity of the immediate restoration, conservation, and further development of the country's natural resources. As one solution for both problems, the organization and work of the Civilian Conservation Corps was undertaken, and in two years, through this unique plan, both problems were well on their way toward solution as great aids to economic recovery. The saving of natural resources was conservation pure and simple.

One important phase of the development of these resources was more than that. It was the making of a nationwide system of recreational areas, smaller more numerous state parks – closer to the people, more easily accessible for their use – supplementing the magnificent national parks.

Conservation work, in all its many phases, is being done in these state park areas from one end of the country to the other. Better facilities for forest firefighting are being provided through the building of truck trails, fire lanes, and observation towers, and the stringing of communication lines. Speed is imperative in fighting forest fires – quick discovery, the quick spreading of the alarm, and roads to reach the scene of action. Dead trees and tangled dry undergrowth are being cleared from the forest where necessary to prevent the starting of fires.

An aggressive war is being waged on the insects, which slowly but surely are destroying natural beauty in our wide-open spaces. Tent caterpillars are a menace to our forest lands, and beautiful meadows and fields are constantly being stripped of their vegetation unless the hungry grasshoppers are fed poisoned bran. The value of modern tree surgery in saving our forests in special situations is being liberally attested.

Planting is another important conservation measure. Seedlings, literally in the millions, are being set out to replace trees ruthlessly destroyed. Shrubbery is being planted on slopes and hillsides to stop soil erosion. More spectacular is the moving of matured trees for landscaping purposes. There's a world of power in this mighty movement – men and machinery, old Dobbin, and even his more picturesque brethren.

The restoration program, which is an important part of the park development plan, represents another form of conservation. Historic events in the life of the nation are still marked by an old fort here, an old mansion there, and other material evidence as associated with things of importance that have happened. Restoration work is saving, or conserving, more vividly than would be possible in any other way, general knowledge of these events. Historic parks have great spiritual and patriotic recreational value. Old Fort Frederick near Hagerstown is being restored as a center of attraction in one of Maryland's state parks. It is a most interesting veteran of three wars: the French and Indian, the War for Independence, and the War Between the States.

On Bogue Banks, near Morehead City, North Carolina, the Civilian Conservation Corps is doing another job of repairing the ravages of time. At Fort Macon there, the sea and the wind have been destroying one of the masterpieces of early military fortifications. On this site for 200 years, forts of one kind or another have protected this strategic point from invasion from the sea. The present fort required 12 years to build; when completed sometime after 1824, it was considered the last word in coastal

defense, and cost the then-amazing sum of \$463,700. In active commission during the War Between the States, it was seized by the Confederates in 1861, and recaptured by the Union forces the following year. The walls are of brick and mortar, four feet thick, and they're rock solid after more than 100 years. Arches, garrison rooms, and ammunition magazines attest the artisanship of its original builders. The Civilian Conservation Corps, under National Park Service direction, is restoring many of the constructional details of the old fort. Here, as in all national park service work of this character, exhaustive research is done to ensure that the restoration is accurate and authentic. Not only the fort, but all the immediately surrounding property is being improved to make it more accessible and interesting to the thousands who visit it each year.

An interesting state park in Georgia surrounds the one-time home of Alexander Stevens, Vice President of the Confederacy. Long ago, the memory of this outstanding southern statesman was honored by the erection of a statue on his home estate. Now the mansion, with its slave quarters and outbuildings, is being restored, and the grounds are being made more attractive to visitors. Strict attention is being paid to details; reproductions of the hand-wrought hardware originally used are being made by Conservation Corps enrollees under skilled direction.

Along Georgia's subtropical coast are many memories of a Spanish civilization which marked this part of the world a century before Jamestown. On the banks of a moss-draped canal, between Savannah and Brunswick, Santo Domingo State Park is being developed, with these crumbling oyster shell walls as a center of interest. The National Park Service's painstaking investigation of the history of these beautiful and interesting old ruins is still in progress.

Here's the first town in Ohio being restored. Schoenbrunn ("beautiful spring") near New Philadelphia was founded in 1772, abandoned in 1777, and the site rediscovered many years later.

The government's rehabilitation program is transferring citizens from localities in which they have been finding it difficult to make a living into more desirable surroundings. Its most vivid illustration in relation to the general conservation movement is in the case of farmers whose lands have been destroyed by soil erosion and one-crop farming. This program is pertinent to the park land because much of the nonproductive land being abandoned is being transformed into parks and recreational areas.

In the functioning of the Civilian Conservation Corps plan, however, there is another and even more interesting form of rehabilitation. Among hundreds of thousands of young men and war veterans enrolled, there have been many unable to read or write. Others, whose schooling has been interrupted, were found to be slipping in the matter of education and morale. The important job of mentally rehabilitating this extremely valuable cross section of the manpower of the country has been entrusted to the Office of Education, Department of the Interior. Competent instructors in Conservation Corps camps conduct classes in many of the educational branches. The boys are given the opportunity to go to school just as they might have done years ago.

In addition, there are many practical manual training courses intended to prepare the enrollees for happier and more remunerative work when their association with the Corps has ended. Many of the Conservation Corps camps communicate with each other over shortwave radio sets for both transmission and reception, which the boys themselves have made.

Do the enrollees welcome these opportunities? Well, a field report not long ago disclosed that in a single Conservation Corps camp within a single month, five enrollees, in their joy at knowing for the first time how to use them, spent a big share of their \$5 cash allowances for fountain pens.

Chipmunks, squirrels, and all the other little brothers of the forest which we expect to see in our journeys outdoors have a very definite place in nature's scheme of saving and rebuilding. Without them, there could be no real conservation. All too few of us are concerned about the rapidly progressing extinction of wildlife in the United States. We may know of the spectacular passing of the buffalos from our western plains, where they once provided a fresh meat supply so essential to the accomplishments of our pioneering forefathers, but we do not know that the extinction of not only these buffalos, but also the little chipmunks, squirrels, beavers, skunks, and even snakes – most maligned of all wild creatures – has for a long time been making even our present-day lives more difficult to live. This without mentioning the truly heroic service many of our native birds perform in checking the depredations of crop destroying insects. The preservation of wildlife is an important part of state park planning. In many of the Conservation Corps camps, great friendships have been developed between the boys and the natives of the areas.

In the Conservation Corps development of state parks is found a perfect blending of conservation and recreation. Besides protecting and saving land and timber and wildlife, this phase of the program develops recreation areas for people who have not had them before. Many kinds of work are required to develop this recreation plan. Hundreds of dams will make lakes and regions where large natural bodies of water are unknown.

Hiking and bridle trails wind through the parks. Each of these trails being constructed by the Conservation Corps in state parks in 42 states is carefully placed by expert park planners so the natural growth of the area will be harmed as little as possible and yet so points of interest can be reached. Splendid views few men have seen because the peaks were inaccessible now open up as these trails lead hikers to the mountaintops.

Racing brooks and deep streams are spanned by rustic bridges of good design. They are built by skilled labor and Conservation Corps enrollees according to plans of graduate engineers and architects. Though thousands gather in the parks to enjoy these new recreational facilities, the old parking problem is no bother; adequate spaces have been provided. Camping is encouraged, and every outdoor convenience is furnished. Open stoves and picnic tables are spotted through the areas, these too built by the Corps enrollees under the direction of skilled laborers and expert designers. Any health menaces that might exist are obliterated by the construction of complete water and waste disposal systems to serve all developed areas.

Probably the most attractive feature of a typical state park is the cabin community, located in one of the area's desirable spots and open to visitors who want to spend a night or a week. State park Conservation Corps companies cover the country and work through all the seasons. These snug cabins in Pueblo State Park in Colorado are going up despite the winter snow. Recreation buildings and picnic shelters are state park essentials. This one stands on the moss-draped banks of the black Edisto, one of South Carolina's loveliest Lowcountry streams.

In some sections, notably the Southwest, park development runs more strongly than elsewhere to building operations. In a country as large as America, the characteristics of the various regions differ widely; indeed, in these differences is found the nation's charm. There are mountainous areas covered

with fresh green trees and dripping with clear cold streams; in other sections are vast ranges and plains of rock; and still elsewhere are the lowlands that stretch down to the sea. The natural features of the state parks vary with the regions in which they are located; in each section there is a different recreational appeal. It follows then that a park's development plan generally conforms to the features and requirements of the surrounding country, in order that the park may best serve the peculiar recreational needs of the people in its particular locality.

In Texas, where nature takes on a rough magnificence, many of the required park structures are built of stone. Here is the land of the Cliff Dwellers, and National Park Service architects have designed park buildings to recreate a prehistoric atmosphere. This recognition and further development of the architecture typical of the history and natural characteristics of the country's several sections is important in emergency conservation work.

Building trails, cutting fire lanes, and protecting and improving timber and land make the conservation work program essentially one requiring well-directed massed manpower. But on the construction projects, skilled labor is necessary. Carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, and electricians are hired from the community in which the camp is located. These men work on the park jobs with the Conservation Corps boys as helpers. Not only does this furnish employment for skilled labor and get the job well done, but it provides the enrollees with excellent opportunities to learn trades. Splitting handmade shingles is a colorful task. The tools for splitting the blocks are ingenious, as are also the appliances devised for holding the shingles during the finishing processes. And almost every camp has its own village blacksmith, plying his fascinating and still useful trade.

So it is all these factors join forces in this unique phase of the recovery program: a federal aid project to save and enjoy a country, to keep nature unsullied and unspoiled wherever possible as a healing retreat from the increasing difficulties of modern life. A project directed by that government agency which has given the world the American national parks: the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior.