Land Utilization in the Allegan State Forest: A Historical Geography

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LAND UTILIZATION IN THE ALLEGAN STATE FOREST:
A HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

by

Martin Lemond

A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
May 1965
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PREFACE

No book, periodical, pamphlet, or magazine article has ever been published devoted exclusively to why and how the Allegan State Forest was established. In other words, no convenient source of information was available concerning the topic of this research. This, admittedly, made the writer’s task more challenging, but it likewise was a handicap because the primary source of information depended upon the reliability of newspaper articles and the keenness of the memory of people interviewed. Basic material was obtained from the plan books submitted by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Resettlement Administration to the United States Department of Agriculture, outlining the goals of the Allegan Land Project, and from available information at the Lands Division Office, Michigan Department of Conservation, Lansing, Michigan. Supplementary material was provided in correspondence from numerous individuals.

Whenever the writer was confronted with a choice of facts, every effort was made to select the most reasonable and probable information. For example, with regard to the total number of acres purchased in Allegan County by the Federal Government, the writer found six different figures quoted by six different sources. The figure used in this research paper is 35,755 acres.
This acreage was considered the most accurate since it was obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture where the official records of the land purchases of the Forest are kept.

The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation to the many persons, too numerous to mention here, who gave assistance and advice which made the completion of this research possible.

Special mention is due Dr. Oscar Horst and Dr. Cyril Stout, advisors at Western Michigan University, for their guidance, and to Paul Schroeder, Forester at Allegan State Forest, for the information he provided.

Martin Lemorand
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INTRODUCTION

In Allegan County, Michigan, there exists an area of land known as the Allegan State Forest (Figs. 1 and 2). The Forest comprises 35,755 acres of land and is located just west of the city of Allegan. It is an area primarily noted for its forestry, wildlife conservation, and recreational facilities. Before becoming a state forest and prior to the 1930's, this land passed through sequential occupancy by Indians, pioneers, lumbermen, and farmers. When the forest area was first settled, the land was abundantly covered with trees. The trees soon became the victims of the lumberman's axe, and once the trees were gone the land was exposed to the farmer's plow. This course of events occurred in many areas of southern Michigan without any drastic effects, but in west-central Allegan County, the physical environment was such that the land was rendered completely unfit for agricultural purposes. Thus, in 1934, the Allegan Land Project was initiated by the Federal Government to eliminate the land problem in a designated area of Allegan County and to pre-

Fig. 1. Location Map of the Allegan State Forest.
pare the area for more suitable purposes.  

What were the physical conditions which rendered westcentral Allegan County unfit for agriculture? Why were the past inhabitants of the Allegan State Forest area declared "guilty" of contributing to the land problem? Delving into the historical and geographical aspects of the Allegan State Forest reveals what the land problem was and how it came to be. The geographical factors which are considered explain the physical circumstances that led to the deterioration of land for agricultural production. Based upon the historical background which is provided, it becomes readily evident that man's use and misuse of the land likewise made it necessary for certain areas of Allegan County to be withdrawn from agricultural production.

An area of worthless sand was transformed into a unique public recreational facility! This, in brief, summarizes the accomplishments of the Allegan Land Project. After the land problem in Allegan County was recognised, the preliminary steps of the Federal Government were to obtain the land and resettle its inhabitants. How did this ultimately resolve the land problem and lead to the establishment of the Allegan State Forest? Did this

\footnote{Melvin L. Moons, Final Plan of Allegan Project, State of Michigan, Submarxinal Land Program, Project No. A-2, A Report to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, on the Allegan Project, Prepared by the Lands Policies Section, Agricultural Adjustment Administration (Allegan: By the author, 1935), pp. 7-8.}
terminate Allegan County’s land problem? West-central Allegan County was not the only area to be confronted with a problem of unproductive soil. Today in southwestern Michigan, other areas of worthless land exist. Potentially these areas are suited for the development of public recreational facilities similar to the Allegan State Forest. In view of the present-day situation—increasing population and more leisure time—the need for public recreational facilities is greater than ever. One purpose for the establishment of the Allegan State Forest was to utilize the land to its potential in order to provide the public with an area reserved for forestry, conservation, and recreation. But a second and equally important purpose of the development of the Forest has been to exemplify, for areas with similar land problems, a successful and beneficial way in which land may be utilized. Since southwestern Michigan is still plagued with the problem of unproductive land, and since there is a growing need in this area for additional public recreational facilities, isn't the most logical solution to the problem obvious?
CHAPTER I

PHYSICAL SETTING

As has been mentioned earlier, two factors were directly responsible for the establishment of the Allegan State Forest—a human factor and a physical factor. Man's contribution, the human factor, resulted from his abuse and misuse of the land. Such action might not have been of serious consequence except for the combination of particular geographical factors which dominated the landscape of the area. The greatest handicap, especially for farmers, was the ubiquitous cover of sand. To understand why sandy soil was predominant and why farmers met with repeated crop failure, one must turn to a consideration of the evolution of local topographic features. An account of other components of the physical environment—soil, vegetation, and climate—contributes to an understanding of the succession of events which have occurred in the past century of human occupancy in the Allegan State Forest.

Topography

The topographic features of Allegan County are principally glacial in origin. In the county there are three morainal ridges, the Kalamazoo, Valparaiso, and Lake Border. The Kalamazoo Moraine
lies in the eastern part of the county and the Lake Border is located to the west, along the shoreline of Lake Michigan. The Valparaiso is centrally located between the other two moraines. The alignment of the moraines is generally northeast to southwest, and they mark zones of stagnation along the eastern margin of the Michigan ice lobe as it retreated from this area during the last glacial period. An apron of sandy outwash plains borders each moraine on the east.

The Allegan State Forest area is divided physically into two major regions: (1) a morainal and, (2) a plains region (Fig. 3). Along the eastern side of the Forest is the Valparaiso Moraine, a hilly region with numerous undrained depressions. The morainal surface gradually slopes down to the plains region which borders it on the west. Local relief for the moraine approaches 100 feet. Although the area is not too steep for farming, the unproductive sandy soil which is present precludes such attempts.

The plains region, which covers the greater part of the Forest, is located between the Valparaiso Moraine and the Lake Border Moraine. During glacial times when the Lake stood at a higher level, this plains region was a reentrant of Lake Michigan. At that time, the Kalamazoo River flowed into the eastern margin of this reentrant and built up a large delta composed of well-sorted sand. Today this delta includes most of the plains region within the Forest. The delta surface slopes gradually from the area of Lake Allegan in a west-northwesterly direction,
Fig. 3. Main Physical Features of the Allegan State Forest.
dropping a total of approximately forty feet in a distance of five miles. The surface is characterized by minor undulations and numerous depressions. The depressions are particularly noticeable in the southwest where there are numerous marshes and lakes. The plains are topographically suitable for agricultural use but, due to the predominance of Plainfield sand, are not adapted to general farming. Such soils are of low productivity and pose a serious problem of land use, probably best solved by maintaining a forest cover.

The Kalamazoo River and its tributaries drain the Forest area. Drainage is generally good except in the marsh lands along the Kalamazoo River and in the southwestern part of the Forest where the marshes and lakes are located (Fig. 3).

Soils

If soils are both deep and fertile, and if climate is favorable, man commonly avails himself of the opportunity to practice agriculture. By contrast, even when climatic conditions are favorable, if soils are shallow or unproductive, agriculture cannot serve as the basis for support. In the past, attempts by farmers to earn a livelihood from the land in the Allegan State Forest have proven unsuccessful. Although climatic conditions in the Forest are favorable for farming, the unfertile sandy soil has prevented this area from being agriculturally productive. There are eight different soil types in the Forest, but in every
instance, whether in the plains or morainal region, Plainfield sand dominates (Fig. 4).

Vegetation

The present vegetation of the Allegan State Forest is predominately a mixture of pine and oak trees, but prior to the days of the lumberman, the majority of trees were white pine (Fig. 5). Mixed hardwood trees were also present, but to a lesser degree. After most of the white pine were cut by the lumbermen, scrubby red and white oak trees gradually appeared and the region became known as the "grubbs area." The farmers who followed the lumbermen into this area had to remove this scrubby growth of oaks before they could turn the soil. When it became apparent that the land was unfit for farming, much of the land was eventually abandoned and the scrubby red and white oak trees reappeared. Sumac and sassafras also grew up in abandoned areas throughout the Forest. Untended apple, peach, or pear trees in the Forest usually indicate the existence of abandoned homesites. The same is true where lilac bushes and flowers are found. Cactus is a type of vegetation that is well adapted to the sandy soil of the Forest. Cacti are scattered throughout the Forest and are especially noticeable in the early summer when they are in full bloom (Fig. 6). Blueberries grow wild in the muck lands of the southwestern part of the Forest (Fig. 3). Ever since the establishment of the Allegan State Forest, reforestation has been of
SOIL TYPES, ALLEGAN STATE FOREST

LEGEND
- PLAINFIELD
- NEWTON and GRANBY
- OTTAWA and BERRIEN
- NAPPANEE and MIAMI
- SAUGATUCK SAND
- MEADOW
- MUCK
- FOX
- RIVER and STREAMS
- LAKES

Fig. 4. Major Soil Types Found in the Allegan State Forest.

SOURCE: SOILS MAP OF ALLEGAN COUNTY, BY ELMER FIPPIN AND THOMAS RICE, DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE, 1939.
Fig. 5. A Township Road Through Second Growth of White Oak and White Pine in 1937.

Fig. 6. Typical Cactus Growth in the Sandy Soil of the Allegan State Forest.
prime consideration. Many plantings were necessary to return the area to its original status of a forest. White and red pines, Norway and white spruce, hemlock, beech, maple, and willow trees were planted in the Forest.

Climate

The climate in the Allegan State Forest area is influenced by the proximity of Lake Michigan because the air flowing across the Lake tends to prevent extremes in temperature. The average annual temperature in the Forest is 49.2°F. In January, the coldest month, the temperature averages 26.3°F. and in July, the warmest month, the temperature averages 72.5°F. The mean precipitation amounts to 33.8 inches and occurs mostly from April to September. The Forest is located within the snow belt of Western Michigan, hence the average fall of 53.9 inches per year represents a greater total than is found in areas farther east. The growing season in this area of Michigan averages about 154 days, but tends to be shorter within the Forest where frequent refer-


2Ibid.

3Ibid.
ence was made to the existence of a "frost-pocket" which embraces the area. 4 Except for the danger of an unusually short growing season, climatic conditions in the Forest are favorable for agriculture.

This, then, is the physical setting of the Allegan State Forest. It was, and still is, an area unfit for agricultural purposes due to the predominance of sandy soil. But a second factor, man, likewise has contributed to the Forest’s land problem. The succeeding section—Historical Background—will reveal man’s contributory role in the destruction of the natural resources of this region and the subsequent establishment of the Allegan State Forest.

4Mcone, p. 3.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of the Allegan State Forest dates back to the days of the Indians and pioneers. One of the determining factors in the establishment of the Allegan State Forest involves the character of land utilization practiced by the early settlers of Allegan County.

The earliest known inhabitants of the Allegan area were Indians, particularly the Ottawa and Pottawatomie tribes.\(^1\) The Indians were attracted to this region because it satisfied their various needs. The hunting and trapping of animals supplied the Indians with furs, skins, and food. There were numerous lakes and streams for fishing and transportation. Trees furnished material for the construction of wigwams and canoes. Berries and nuts were found in the forest and maple trees supplied the Indians with maple syrup. In addition, a small amount of farming was practiced by the Indians to supplement their diet: corn, pumpkin, and beans were the principal crops.

The Ottawa and Pottawatomie Indians had settled in the

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Allegan County area as early as 1670. Following the defeat of the English and the Indians in the War of 1812, a treaty was signed at Chicago on August 19, 1821, which conveyed land, including Allegan County, from the Indians to the white man. By 1840, the Pottawatomie were removed to territory beyond the Mississippi, and the Ottawa went to a reservation in the Grand Traverse region.

In 1830, ten years preceding the departure of the Indians, Allegan County’s first white settler arrived. He was William G. Butler from Hartford, Connecticut. The location of Mr. Butler’s homestead was on the present site of the village of Saugatuck, three miles up from the mouth of the Kalamazoo River, and his first business was trading with the Indians. Except for transient traders, Butler and his family were the only white residents of the western half of Allegan County for three years.

By 1858, all of the twenty-four Allegan townships had been settled. Frame houses were being built instead of log cabins, old well-sweepers were giving way to modern pumps, and orchards

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2 Ibid., pp. 12, 17.


4 Johnson, p. 41.

5 Ibid., pp. 30-31.

6 Ibid., p. 44.
were in full fruitage on many farms. In less than thirty years the county had been changed from a wilderness into a land of pleasant homes. Within thirty years, between 1840 and 1870, the population grew from 1,783 to 32,105.7

Once a pioneer selected the location for his settlement, the first task he undertook was to clear the area so that he could build his home and plant some crops. The trees that were felled to provide this space were used for the construction of the house, a fence, some furniture, and an endless supply of logs for the fireplace, while unwanted timber was piled and burned. If enough immigrants settled in one location, churches, schools, and other community buildings were eventually needed; consequently, more and more trees were cut. As the population increased, the number of trees decreased!

In those places in the county where the first settlers were interested in farming, the forests were an obstacle to be overcome. There were, of course, those settlers who considered the surrounding forest an asset and who selected a location because of the timber's presence. And if the settler had the construction of a sawmill in mind, a nearby creek was also necessary for floating logs and supplying water power for the mill.

During the great lumber era, beginning in the 1830's, there were many sawmills to contribute to Allegan County's first major
industry of lumbering. Numerous mills were placed at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River because of its access into Lake Michigan. Logs floated down the river to the sawmills were sawed into lumber and transported to market by boats. Other sawmills were located along Lake Michigan and inland near suitable streams. Several decades later, evidences of many of the inland mills were to be revealed by slabs and beds of sawdust which stream-improvement crews ran into in cleaning out the streams for trout. On many streams, there were remains of dams and evidences of ponds which had been used for log storage and water power to run the mills. Some of these dams have been replaced and today the ponds are used for fishing and recreation.

In those early days of settlement, to find the necessary combination of an abundant lumber supply and a nearby suitable stream was no easy matter, and many mills failed as a result. In Clyde Township, for example, which was located in the heart of the pine land, the sawmills failed because of the excessive cost of transporting the lumber to the distant Kalamazoo River. Many lumber towns were doomed to an early and speedy decay, not due to transportation costs as was the case in Clyde Township, but because the surrounding pine forests were soon exhausted and there was no longer a supply of timber available. The lumber town's

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banks, hotels, and stores closed their doors and the people gradually drifted away. Fortunes were made by the lumbermen in one town and then spent developing other promising areas into new lumber towns. Lumbering was the first important industry in Allegan County. Large shipments of lumber were sent to nearby furniture companies and paper mills, and equally large quantities were used to satisfy local needs for construction, railroad ties, telegraph poles, and fuel.

By 1890, most of the large timber was gone, either cut away by the lumbermen or burned off in forest fires. Small growths and stumps were all that remained of a once great forest area. So it was that the plow replaced the axe! After the timber was stripped and the stumps were removed by cutting, pulling, and burning, attention was given to agriculture. Soon all traces of the pioneer days were gone and a land of cultivated fields and orchards came to exist where once the pine tree reigned supreme. Although agriculture prospered in some areas in Allegan County it was destined to failure in others. One such area of failure was located in the townships of Manlius, Heath, Monterey, Clyde, Valley, Allegan, Lee, and Cheshire. The problem in this area of Allegan County was not one of soil alone, nor of wind erosion, nor cut-over forests, nor forest fires, nor that of inexperienced

9Paul Schroeder, "Forestry in Allegan County" (Headquarters, Allegan State Forest, 1952), p. 3. (Mimeographed.)
farmers and pitably low farm incomes—the trouble arose from a combination of all these factors.  

Initially, farming by the settlers was done on sandy soils since these were more easily worked and needed less drainage. When first cleared, the soil contained sufficient leaf mold to hold moisture for crop production. There was only limited fertility in the leaf mold however, and once the soil was tilled and exposed to the force of wind, the thin superficial layer soon disappeared. There was nothing left but sand and, eventually, as the wind continued to remove the top levels of the sand, a clear yellow outwash of soil, which was below the sand, began to "creep" to the surface. The natural fertility of this yellow soil was low and it had little moisture-holding capacity. Without the protective covering of timber and brush, the wind blew out patches of sand, acres in extent, and these "blow-holes" constantly grew in size and number ([Fig. 7]). Thus, between 1890 and 1900, the dry exposed land became nothing more than a dust bowl.

Since well-drained sands comprised the main constituent of soil in many parts of Allegan County, especially in the west-central portion, farming endeavors were quite futile. Although precipitation for this area was sufficient for growing crops, the efficiency of the precipitation was very low because the sandy soil dried quickly and was then subjected to wind erosion, caus-

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10 Ibid.
Fig. 7. A Small "Flow-Hole," An Example of Wind Erosion, 1937.

Fig. 8. Abandoned House in the Allegan State Forest in 1937.
ing entire crops to be uprooted or completely covered. There
was very little good pasture land and it was extremely difficult
to get a good stand of grass because of the low fertility of the
soil, the lack of moisture, and the constant action of the winds.
In addition to the lack of organic matter, the soils were quite
acid. The length of the crop-growing season was shorter than
that of the surrounding territory because of the existence of a
"frost-pocket" which embraced the area. To further complicate
the problem, some forty or more soil types were present through-
out the county which made the problem of farming a very peculiar
one in that no blanket recommendation could be made because each
farm usually experienced a new and entirely different problem. Any
attempts to alleviate the soil problem on a county-wide basis
were extremely difficult when such individual consideration was
necessary. In the Allegan State Forest alone, eight distinct
soil types can be found (Fig. 4).

The soil in the west-central portion of Allegan County has
been unfit for crop production since the 1890's. Why, then,
would anyone purchase the land for farming? The majority of buy-
ers were from such nearby cities as Chicago and Grand Rapids.

11 Land Acquisition Project: Allegan Project LA-Mi-3, A Re-
port to the Resettlement Administration on the Allegan Project,
Prepared by the Land Utilization Division, Resettlement Adminis-

12 Interview with Arthur Morley, retired Allegan County
Agricultural Agent, December 19, 1963.
They were people who had dreams of securing independence for themselves by moving to a farm. They were attracted by tempting advertisements such as: "Yellow Michigan Musk! Only $30 an acre! Own your own farm in Michigan!" What the advertisements neglected to explain was that "Yellow Michigan Musk" was nothing other than old worthless Plainfield sand.

Many people purchased the land sight-unseen, sold all of their belongings, moved onto the land, and invested their small savings in improvements with the vain hope of succeeding. Some purchasers were more skeptical and wisely felt, "I've got to see it to believe it," but they fell prey to unscrupulous real estate dealers. This was the type of dealer who showed the land during the spring when everything looked its very best with green grass, blooming trees, and blossoming flowers. Perhaps the dealer waited and showed the land in the winter when everything was hidden under a blanket of snow. The country even looked inviting in the autumn with the brilliant colors of red, gold, orange, green, and brown dominating the scene. Beware of the summer, though, when the sandy land was hot and dry and the abundance of crops that was supposed to exist simply was nowhere to be found. Some dealers resorted to deceiving the inexperienced city dweller by bringing corn from other areas and displaying the corn as though it had been produced on the prospective buyer's land. Other

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dealers told their prospects the land contained a spring; then they revealed what was in reality a barrel planted in a hole in the sand.

Between 1890 and 1900, the fertility of the soil gradually diminished and the number of residents within the area decreased. Those who were financially able simply moved to a more productive location. The more fortunate ones were able to resell their land, usually to other city people. Some owners were satisfied to exchange their land for the transportation cost of taking them and their belongings to the Allegan depot.

In cases where the land was neither sold nor traded, a great number of farms were abandoned and no attempt was made to receive returns on investments. When the property taxes remained unpaid the title to the land reverted to the state government. In such instances of abandonment, the formerly tilled fields were gradually covered by an encroaching growth of brush and scrub oak (Figs. 8 and 9).

The people who did not sell, trade, or abandon their farms remained and struggled vainly to make a living from the land. The majority of these people became relief problems. Food was furnished by the Red Cross and county welfare. The people seemed content to subsist on the two or three hundred dollars per year that they received from a few odd jobs, Federal Relief Work, and
Fig. 9. Abandoned Homestead in The Allegan State Forest in 1937.

Fig. 10. Typical Squatter's Home in The Allegan State Forest, 1937.
welfare agencies. The standard of living within the rural area was far below that of the surrounding communities. Sanitary conditions were unsatisfactory and it was only through constant vigilance and hard work on the part of the local health unit that serious epidemics were held to a minimum. It was difficult to obtain a satisfactory domestic water supply and the constant threat of typhoid or other sickness was ever present. Malnutrition was present, especially among the children, and resulted in an inevitable lowering of social well-being. This paved the way for susceptibility to illness and further increased the people's reliance upon public welfare. It was only with the aid of local welfare that the majority of the people were able to eke out an existence between 1890 and 1930.

During the depression of the 1930's, the situation continued to deteriorate. City people who lost their jobs, their belongings, and could no longer pay their rent, came in desperation to the rural area and lived in the abandoned buildings or improvised their own homemade shacks (Fig. 10). The majority of these "squatter's" dwellings had little or no appraisal value, and they were certainly not conducive to an acceptable social life and the proper rearing of children. After six months residence had been fulfilled, the "squatters" became additional relief clients.

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14Moore, pp. 7-8.
Such was the grim situation in 1934. Because the soil was neither fertile nor capable of retaining moisture, and because the area was prey to wind erosion, families living in "the problem area" of Allegan County were unable to earn a livelihood from the land. Acute social and economic problems developed as the level of living decreased and the number of welfare cases increased. To alleviate the soil problem and to reduce the increasing number of welfare cases simultaneously, the Allegan Land Project was proposed by the Advisory Land Use Committee of the State Planning Commission of Michigan, in the early fall of 1934. The Land Use Committee chose approximately 92,000 acres in Allegan County as an area that would lend itself especially well for further investigation and development in connection with the submarginal land program of the Federal Government.

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CHAPTER III

THE ALLEGAN LAND PROJECT

Initiation

The Allegan Land Project was a part of a nationwide campaign to deal with many of the problems created by the misuse of land and to demonstrate, by putting the land to its best use, how these problems could be handled. The purchase of submarginal land throughout the United States was made during the depression days of the 1930's. The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of April 8, 1935, made provisions for the development and improvement of the purchased areas through public works.¹ The areas of submarginal land were bought with the expectation that they were to be reserved for a number of specific public purposes including recreation, wildlife refuges, watershed protection, timber production, and grazing. In June, 1935, the purchase, development, and management of submarginal farm land was transferred to a newly created agency, the Resettlement Administration. By the middle of 1940, approximately 11.3 million acres of submarginal and unproductive farmland throughout the United States had been ac-

Concerning the Allegan Land Project, the stated purpose was threefold:

1. To withdraw from agricultural use an area of land in Allegan County that was deemed unsuitable for productive farming.
2. To relocate the residents upon tracts of land outside of the Project area where a suitable livelihood could be obtained.
3. To provide Federal funds to finance the purchase and development of the land. After the land had been restored to its original status of a forest, it was to be used only for forestry, for recreation, and for wildlife conservation. Upon completion of the Allegan Project, the maintenance and operation of the forest area was to be the responsibility of the Michigan State Conservation Department.

The Allegan Land Project was officially established on January 14, 1935. At this time, the Michigan Land Use Committee submitted a preliminary plan of the Allegan Land Project to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration; approval was granted on

2 Ibid.

January 22. The task of appraising and optioning the submarginal land was begun the following month by the State Rural Rehabilitation Administration. On April 16, 1935, a final plan was submitted to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration to present a more composite picture of the Project area and to explain more fully the proposed resettlement and development plans.

The goal of the State Rural Rehabilitation Administration was to secure the options for approximately 77,000 acres in the west-central part of Allegan County. The contiguous parts of Manlius, Heath, Monterey, Clyde, Valley, Allegan, Lee, and Cheshire Townships comprised "the purchase area" (Fig. 2). To the northeast of "the purchase area" was an additional potential problem area which was considered as an adjacent extension of the purchase. Its area consisted of about 15,000 acres, and extended through Monterey, Salem, and Dorr Townships, thus increasing the acreage involved in the Allegan Land Project to 92,000 acres (Fig. 2). In July, 1935, five months after optioning had begun and before the final plan had received presidential approval, the State Rehabilitation Administration received instructions from the Federal Government to curtail optioning submarginal land in Allegan County. Since the social and economic conditions were so acute in Allegan County, the Federal Government deemed it advis-

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able to cease optioning any additional land and to use the money, instead, for work relief purposes. The State Rehabilitation Administration was to concentrate its efforts on the land already optioned, on resettling the families from the optioned land, and on finding work for these people so that they could become self-supporting. The latter accomplishment was intended to ease the tax burden on the people in the surrounding communities and to bring relief to the county's indigent costs.

A second reason for revising the original Allegan Land Project was due to the establishment of the Resettlement Administration. This Federal agency was created solely for the purpose of managing the submarginal land projects. Prior to this, all land earmarked in the early stages of the purchase program for recreation or park purposes had been turned over to the National Park Service, Department of Interior, for administration. Likewise, land earmarked for wildlife and migratory bird refuges had been transferred to the Bureau of Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture. Instead of having different departments handling various phases of the land projects, the Resettlement Administration became responsible for the complete program. Funds that had previously been set aside to purchase and develop submarginal land throughout the United States had been withdrawn and used for

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work relief. Under the new Resettlement Administration, a four-billion dollar Federal relief fund was provided to finance all land projects. This single relief fund was to finance all land options and purchases as well as the expense of relocating the settlers and the actual development of the land. For the Allegan Land Project, less than $420,000, or about half of what was originally proposed, was allotted by the Federal Government.6

In appraising the value of the land, such factors as the type of soil, buildings, timber, and land improvements were considered. With regard to the houses and buildings, they ranged from small shacks, unsuitable for occupancy, to good homes that were out of proportion to the productivity of the soil on which they were situated. The land owners were always given an opportunity to remove their buildings to a new location, but rarely was such an expensive and involved procedure feasible. In most cases where the farms had been abandoned, the buildings had been allowed to deteriorate until they were in such a tumbled-down condition that they had no appraisal value and there was no chance of ever reclaiming them for living quarters (Figs. 8 and 9). Such buildings were dismantled or burned to remove them from the area as objectionable sights and to prevent them from ever being used again by "squatters." Buildings that were in good

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condition either remained and were used to house the future caretakers and workers, or they were dismantled and the material was utilized in constructing new buildings. A few dwellings were auctioned off, but this was permitted only if the purchaser agreed to remove the entire building from the property.

Appraisal prices of the land to be optioned ranged from a low of $4.00 an acre to a high of $212.85 per acre. The average was $11.66 per acre. In order to option as much land as possible with the available funds, tracts of land with a high appraisal value were omitted from consideration; consequently, the optioned tracts were somewhat scattered throughout the area (Fig. 11). The tracts ranged from a maximum of 1,650 to a minimum of 5 acres. The majority of the tracts were approximately 80 to 100 acres. Approximately 35,755 acres of submarginal land was optioned by January, 1936, at an average cost of $11.66 per acre, making the total purchase price $416,903.30. Less than half of the original 77,000 acres were purchased; hence, much submarginal land was retained by private owners.

Fig. 11. Map of Land Ownership in the Allegan State Forest.
As in the original plan, "the purchase area" involved land in the townships of Manlius, Heath, Monterey, Clyde, Valley, Allegan, Lee, and Cheshire. The most notable difference between the original plan and the second plan was the large amount of land not purchased in Heath, Monterey, Salem, Dorr, and Lee Townships (Fig. 2). Most of this excluded land was part of the potential problem area originally considered as an adjacent extension of "the purchase area". Although the amount of land involved was less than originally contemplated, the purpose of the Allegan Land Project remained unchanged.

Securing the options proved to be slow and time-consuming. When the land owners were first approached and interviewed, they wanted to know what definite settlement plans the Rural Rehabilitation Administration had for them. Such plans required time and preparation, and satisfactory details could not be prematurely revealed. Many of the people encountered were hesitant in making any quick readjustment in their lives and they preferred to see how the program succeeded with their neighbors before undertaking it themselves. A few outrightly refused to option their land, but the majority simply delayed giving their decision.

Once the land was optioned, the title had to be legally cleared and such existing encumbrances as mortgages, leases, and delinquent taxes had to be settled before the final payment was made. The encumbrances presented no obstacle because the mortgage holders were now able to see immediate tangible returns on
investments they had long considered uncollectable; the lessees had no objections to the sale of the property, either, as they were anxious to better their conditions on more productive lands; and the amount of back taxes that the government had to pay was simply deducted from the price the landowner received for his option.

The task of resettling and employing people from the optioned land was inaugurated during the latter part of 1936. Only a small percentage of the people were competent farmers, so the work of resettlement demanded serious study; in other words, it was not feasible simply to resettle all of the families on another farm. The tenants to be resettled were divided into three groups:

1. Those unsuited to agriculture or lacking the ability to earn a decent living in other lines of endeavor were employed to work on the development of the Allegan Land Project.

2. An earnest endeavor was made to assist other "nonfarmers" to obtain employment in other lines of work outside of "the purchase area" so that they might realize a fair livelihood.

3. The farmers who had demonstrated an ability to succeed in farming but who were financially unable to purchase a farm were permitted to reside on government-owned land outside
of "the purchase area" where the soil was fertile. Once the farmer had repaid the purchase price, the Government relinquished the title to the land.

The Resettlement Administration—the Federal agency that had been created in June, 1935, to manage the submarginal land projects—had two primary functions:

1. To provide for supervision of the resettled farmers so that each could own and manage his new land at a profit.

2. To make loans at five per cent interest available to these farmers to enable each to purchase his farm, livestock, grain, and equipment.

The Resettlement Administration, through a program of financed and supervised farm management, attempted to establish a low-income farm families on productive farm units in order to provide a healthful and satisfactory level of living. The cash income that the family now received paid for the operating expenses of the farm and home, repaid the farmer's capital obligations, and allowed the family to participate in the normal social, educational, and economic activities of the community.
The area purchased for the Allegan Land Project became known as the Allegan State Forest in 1940. At this time, a long-term Cooperative License Agreement was reached between the Forest Service, a division of the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Michigan Conservation Department whereby the Allegan land that had been optioned by the Federal Government was to be leased to the State of Michigan. The terms of the lease were for fifty years, beginning March 29, 1940, and were automatically renewable for three successive terms of fifteen years each unless written notice to the contrary was exchanged ninety days prior to the expiration date. It was specifically stated in the lease that the Allegan County land was to be used for forestry, wildlife conservation, and recreation. If the United States needed the land for military purposes, the lease was to be terminated immediately. If the terms of the lease were not upheld by the State of Michigan, termination of the lease was to go into effect twelve months after notice by the United States Government.

Under the terms of the lease, the land involved in the Allegan Land Project was to be managed by the Michigan Conservation Department but was to be retained as the property of the Federal

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11 Lease between the United States Government acting by and through the Secretary of Agriculture, and the State of Michigan acting by and through the Michigan Department of Conservation. (Lansing: March 29, 1940).
Government. Even though the State of Michigan had entered into a long-term license agreement, a letter was sent to the United States Forest Service which requested that the State of Michigan be granted the title to the Allegan State Forest. In exchange, the United States was offered Michigan-owned land of equal value located within the boundaries of national forests in northern Michigan. Such an exchange of land would provide both the State of Michigan and the Federal Government an opportunity to consolidate their land holdings. Since consolidation affected the efficiency and economy of operating the land holdings, it was administratively advantageous to both Michigan and the Forest Service to agree to an exchange of land. The first land exchange was made on September 9, 1949. The United States gave 9,494.70 acres in Heath, Clyde, Valley, Lee, and Cheshire Townships to the State of Michigan in exchange for 32,563.04 acres of land in Marquette and Hiawatha National Forests.12 On March 21, 1951, 30,332.51 acres of land in Huron, Ottawa, and Hiawatha National Forests became the property of the United States for 12,269.35 acres in Manlius, Heath, Monterey, and Valley Townships in Allegan County.13 The third exchange of land was made April 16, 1951.


13Ibid., #21, March 21, 1951.
The United States received 22,072.73 acres of land in the Manistee National Forest in exchange for 5,400.19 acres in Heath and Valley Townships. The fourth and final exchange took place on April 18, 1951. The State of Michigan relinquished 25,594.99 acres of land within the Manistee National Forest area in return for 7,222.01 acres in the townships of Manlius, Heath, Allegan, and Cheshire. In none of these exchanges was money involved. The value of the land was appraised, however, to allow a fair and even exchange to occur. The Allegan County land was considered more valuable than the territory in northern Michigan. The average price per acre for the Allegan State Forest was estimated at $10.79, while the average price for each acre in northern Michigan was only valued at $3.09. This explains why the United States received three and four times as many acres as did the State of Michigan in each of the four exchanges.

The United States received a total of 110,563.27 acres of land in the national forest area in northern Michigan and the State of Michigan acquired 34,386.25 acres of land in Allegan County. As a result of the four land exchanges, of the 35,755 acres of land obtained by the Federal Government in the Allegan Land Project, 34,386.25 acres now belonged to the State of Michigan. The remaining 1,368.75 acres were still the property of the

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15. Ibid., #20, April 18, 1951.
United States Government. On June 16, 1953, the Acting Secretary of Agriculture, in a letter to the Michigan Department of Conservation, stated that the United States Department of Agriculture was conveying to Michigan, without compensation, the title to the remaining 1,368.75 acres in Allegan State Forest. This final transaction, which was completed by June 2, 1954, simultaneously cancelled the long-term Cooperative License Agreement between the State of Michigan and the United States Government. Cancellation of the agreement was subject to the following conditions:

1. The lands must continue to be used for public purposes in connection with land-conservation and land-utilization.
2. Seventy-five per cent of the minerals must be reserved by the United States.
3. All fissionable materials must be reserved by the United States.

Development

To put the Project into effect, and to prepare the land for the development of a forest to be used for wildlife conservation and for recreation, numerous jobs had to be completed. The program for development included:

1. General land treatment—undesirable trees, brush, and poisonous plants were removed and useless buildings were destroyed so that "squatters" could not return to the area.

2. Structural improvements—since fire was a constant menace to the forest, and since nearly seventy per cent of the purchased submarginal land was covered with scrub oak and brush, proper fire protection of the area necessitated a ranger station, two lookout towers, and contact stations.

3. Transportation improvements—access to all parts of the area was important and many roads served the dual purpose of a firebreak and transportation. Over one hundred miles of fire lanes, truck trails, and foot trails were necessary for access and for fire protection and service.

4. Erosion control and drainage—to control wind erosion on the exposed sandy soil, several hundred acres of eroded land were given various types of protective brush covering. Crude fences were erected to act as windbreaks. As soon as the surface
was stabilized, jack pine, shrubs, and vines were planted and the shifting sand was held in place until a cover developed that could hold it permanently. Then the planting of trees began. Once the land was planted with trees, wind erosion was no longer a problem.

5. Forest development—improvement of the existing conditions and, through proper forest management, the planting of new trees. A good stand of trees was fundamental to the successful control of erosion. White and red pine, Norway and white spruce, mountain ash, hemlock, beech, and maple trees were planted on the bare tracts and the cut-over acres. It was estimated that there were 8,083 acres of new trees planted between 1935 and the middle of 1940.17

6. Landscaping and recreation—roadside clearing, graveling drives, sodding, parking areas, permanent camp and picnic facilities, bathing areas, and sanitary and administrative buildings prepared the area for public recreation.

17 Schroeder, p. 3.
7. **Wildlife—public hunting and fishing areas** were developed. A game preserve was established. Dikes and dams were constructed to provide suitable habitat for migratory waterfowl and fish. Although most of the tree plantings in the forest were pines, hardwood species and shrubs were planted for game food and cover. Trees were planted into small groupings, and openings were left to enable the game to move more easily from one area to another. Over one hundred food patches were planted throughout the forest to supply rabbits, pheasants, grouse, squirrels, raccoons, ducks, and geese with such foods as corn, rye, and vetch. A line of trees was planted around each patch to protect the animals from predators and the food from the wind. Soft maple trees were planted along streams to furnish winter food for the deer.

An adequate supply of wild fowl food was made available in the marshy areas by planting a variety of aquatic plants. Feeding stations were placed on rafts on Lake Allegan to encourage more birds to come into the area.

Hundreds of acres of existing marshland and
overflow river bottom lands provided excellent resting and breeding places for ducks and geese. Earthen dikes were constructed to impound the spring floodwaters and to hold a sufficient amount of moisture in the swamps throughout the dry season. Lakes and streams were abundantly stocked with trout and bass and other game fish. The trout streams were improved by speeding the flow of water, by narrowing the channels, and by placing gravel beds, rock riffles, deflectors, and pine stumps where they were most effective in bettering habitat for trout. Willows were planted along stretches of the banks to give shade and protection; some plantings became so dense as to serve as trout sanctuaries.

Most of the developmental projects that were attempted were successfully completed. Only occasionally did an idea, when once put into practice, fail. It was proposed, for example, that a bird sanctuary, similar to the Kellogg Sanctuary near Battle Creek, be established to attract tourists to Allegan State Forest. To accomplish this, duck and goose hunting was banned on the western half of Lake Allegan to avoid frightening the birds away. Although feeding stations were planted on rafts on the lakes, birds apparently were not attracted to the area, and the sanc-
tuary failed to materialize. Another unsuccessful project was the fish-rearing pond west of the Allegan Dam (Fig. 12). Bass and other game fish were raised quite successfully, but when the fish were planted in the water of Lake Allegan, the pollution problem was so bad that only the rough fish, such as carp and suckers, were able to survive. The fish-rearing pond was discontinued in the early part of 1950.

The major developments of the Allegan Project were completed in the early part of the 1940's. Since then, various programs have been undertaken to further improve the usefulness of the Forest. For example, additional trees have been planted, more camping facilities have been constructed, and wild turkeys have been placed in the Forest to attract tourists. All of the Project's development work was that for which the area was best adapted, and all phases of the program were steps toward a necessary readjustment in land use.

Benefits

Many substantial public benefits resulted from the accomplishment of the Allegan Land Project. The initial benefits of the project were primarily designed to curb the depressed social and economic conditions resulting from unemployment and an inability to make a living on submarginal land. Relief costs and local taxes were reduced and the standard of living of the relocated settlers improved because they were placed in a better
Fig. 12. Map of Recreational Facilities in the Allegan State Forest.
economic position. The maintenance of unnecessary roads in "the problem area" which previously served the scattered population was eliminated and this consequently effected a reduction in taxes.\(^\text{18}\) A less costly and more efficient system of education was accomplished by the public acquisition of the submarginal land. Educational costs were reduced because most of the schools in "the problem area" were closed and a consolidated system was established for the remaining families.

In addition to the initial benefits, the general public of today can also profit from the development of the Allegan Land Project. A total of 35,755 acres of abused and misused land has been restored to a forest land and rededicated to public use as an area for recreation and for wildlife conservation. Public control of the area has provided better and more complete fire prevention methods and the cost of fire protection has been reduced because the presence of fire lanes, new roads, and improved secondary roads provide ready access, without excessive cost, to all land in the area. Due to the sandy and well-drained soil, usable secondary roads and trails have been built at a minimum of cost.\(^\text{19}\) Through closer supervision, fish and game violations have been reduced and a management program for the protection of wildlife has added to the public value of the area. The Project

\(^{18}\text{Keene, p. 27.}\)

\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}\)
serves as a repeatable demonstration of proper land use and as an incentive to local, county, and state officials to effect similar adjustments in the future.
CHAPTER IV

THE ALLEGAN STATE FOREST TODAY, AND THE FUTURE

Seeing the Allegan State Forest in its present condition makes it difficult to comprehend all that has happened since the Indians and pioneers occupied the area. With all of its trees, waterways, animals, and recreation areas, with its inviting atmosphere of peace and quiet, with its undisturbed appearance, the Forest may give the impression that it has never been anything but an area devoted to recreation and wildlife. A leisurely tour through the Forest will soon alter this deception because clues from the Forest’s past still exist. Whichever trail is chosen, a hiker will be going backwards in time, following the footsteps of the Indians and pioneers of long ago.

There are several marked hiking trails and an endless network of foot trails for hiking, sight-seeing, and nature study (Fig. 12). South of 112th Avenue and just west of Swan Creek is a trail along which are located the “Indian Marker Trees” (Fig. 12). Originally these saplings were bent in a certain direction, perhaps to indicate a trail or a nearby spring. One of these trees forms a natural arch beneath which hikers pass. There are remains of “Indian Paint Pots,” depressions in the ground where the Indians dug colored minerals for making their ceremonial face
paints. Other trails lead to what remains of the "Bee Line" stagecoach trail, the right-of-way to a narrow gauge timber railroad, and plank roads. Foundations of abandoned timber camps, deserted farm buildings, "squatter's" shacks, and forlorn schoolhouses can be found throughout the Forest.

At Lakeview Camp on Lake Allegan are four buildings and the foundations of two other buildings (Fig. 12). When the Allegan Land Project was getting under way, these buildings were part of the Resettlement Camp housing workers for the Project. The Resettlement Camp was opened in July, 1936, but due to a lack of funds from the Works Progress Administration, the camp was able to remain open only until June, 1938. Most of the camp's fourteen buildings were closed in October, 1937; only eighty-four of the several hundred workers were permitted to remain. The camp was leased to the State Board of Control for Vocational Education in May, 1940. Under this program, such agencies as the Michigan Association of Future Farmers of America and the Michigan Society for Vocational Education were permitted to use the camp. The Resettlement Camp was then renamed "Camp Mich Vo Ed." During the Second World War, this camp was used as a prisoner of war camp. German prisoners captured in North Africa were brought to this camp in May, 1944, under the Federal Emergency Farm Labor Shortage

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2 Ibid., May 31, 1940, p. 1.
During the War, farm labor was in short supply, so the German prisoners were used as "farmhands" in Allegan County. Also, the prisoners were used at a canning factory in Pennville. The prison camp was closed January 3, 1946. That summer, the camp was used to house groups of vacationing children, and for a period of six weeks, ending September 30, the camp served as an emergency shelter for 150 Holland, Michigan, canning factory workers. Since then, the camp has occasionally been used to shelter Boy Scouts and 4-H campers.

In the early 1930's, the Swan Creek Camp area was the site of a nudist colony (Fig. 12). The colony was open only during the warmer season and was appropriately called the Sunshine Sports League. The director of the colony, Fred Ring, was a dancing master from Kalamazoo. In June, 1934, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that nudism in the State was prohibited. The members of the Sunshine Sports League were permitted to remain at the colony on the condition that they wear clothing such as shorts, shirts, swimsuits, etc. In 1935, the sixty acres comprising the nudist colony were optioned to the Federal Government and became a part of the submarginal land project.

There are still traces of the "blow-holes" that were created by wind erosion of the denuded soil. And along the steep river

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3 Ibid., May 19, 1944, p. 1.
banks can be seen the imprints and depressions left of log roll-
ways of the bygone lumber days. Traces of one such log rollway
can be seen along the bank of Swan Creek at the Swan Creek Camp
Ground (Fig. 12).

Each year the Forest's wildlife attracts many hunters who
are in pursuit of deer, fox, raccoons, squirrels, woodchucks,
rabbits, oppossums, muskrats, pheasants, ruffled grouse, as well
as other game animals. The laws that apply to hunting throughout
the State of Michigan are enforced in Allegan State Forest. The
7,000 acre Swan Creek Wildlife Experiment Station, located within
the boundaries of the Forest, functions primarily as a place for
wildlife research and is open to managed public hunting (Fig. 12).
The Station area lies along the Kalamazoo River and Swan Creek
and its headquarters include a laboratory and biologist's resi-
dence where information, maps, and hunting permits may be obtained.
It is from the Station's office that goose hunting at the
area's famed "Highbanks" is controlled and from which permits are
issued (Fig. 12). Not within the Forest is the Fennville State
Game area (Fig. 11). The 3,500 acres which once comprised the
famous Todd and Selah mint farms are now a managed hunting ground
open to the public.

For the fishermen there is lake fishing on Little Tom, Ely,
Mud, Round, Perch, and Crooked Lakes as well as Swan Creek Pond
(Fig. 12). The many streams in the Forest offer from fair to ex-
cellent trout fishing. Although no boat liveries are available,
launching sites are located on all of the lakes; boating is permitted on most lakes where there is public access.

At the present time there are five campgrounds in operation in the Forest (Fig. 12). Eke Point Campground, located on the southern shore of Lake Allegan, is no longer in operation because continued vandalism has severely damaged its permanent facilities. Only the barest accommodations for outdoor living are provided at the campgrounds. These include picnic tables, fireplaces, drinking water, and toilets. Camping and picnicking are permitted in areas other than the five designated campgrounds, but prior permission should first be obtained from the Michigan Department of Conservation. This may be accomplished by contacting the personnel at the Allegan State Forest Headquarters.

Some of the privately-owned land contains gardening endeavors and the results are interesting to observe. Depending on the amount of rainfall, the length of the frost-free season, and the location, some success is achieved with corn, potatoes, wheat, rye, and garden truck, but a very good productive season seems to be the exception.

For the past twenty-five years, the Allegan State Forest has provided the public with a unique recreation area. Public acceptance and utilization of the Forest have been consistently good throughout the years. To encourage more public response to the uses of the Forest, however, the Michigan Conservation Department
is planning to change the name of the Forest to Allegan State Game Area. To designate the area as a state forest limits some people's interpretation of the Forest as just a place with trees, woods, lumbering, etc., and not necessarily a source of recreation and a home for wildlife. It is hoped that the new name will remedy this situation and that more people will take advantage of their access to the only state forest in the southern part of Michigan.

A second revision planned by the Michigan Conservation Department is to discontinue the position of the state forester who, in the past, has served as the manager of the Allegan State Forest. Hereafter, the Allegan State Game Area will include not only the original Forest, but also the areas now known as The Swan Creek Wildlife Experimental Station and The Fennville State Game Area (Fig. 4). The boundaries of the Forest, the Swan Creek Station, and the Fennville Area are to be combined so that one person, as opposed to three, can act as the director of the area. Consequently, administrative costs will be reduced.

The two revisions affecting the Allegan State Forest were placed in effect in the summer of 1964. Although the name of the Forest has been changed, the Forest is basically the same because it continues to be an area dedicated to forestry, wildlife conservation, and recreation. Although no records are kept which reveal how many people utilize the services of the Forest, such outdoor activities as camping and fishing seem to increase
in popularity each year. If this trend persists, the Allegan State Game Area will doubtless continue to be an annual attraction to increasing thousands of campers, picnickers, hunters, fishermen, and tourists.

In this day and age of increasing population and shorter work week, more and more people are having more and more time for fun and relaxation. The need for public recreation areas, therefore, continues to increase. During the summer months in particular, Michigan's public recreation areas are taxed to the limit. This is true for the Allegan State Forest. Since 1940, when the Forest was officially designated as a state forest, the population in the nearby vicinity has increased greatly. In the past twenty years, the population of Allegan, Barry, Kalamazoo, Kent, Ottawa, and Van Buren Counties has increased by over a quarter of a million inhabitants. And the Allegan State Forest serves to attract tourists from far beyond the limits of these immediately adjacent counties. It should also be noted that the Forest is the only public recreation area of its kind and size in the southern half of Michigan.

That there is a need for more public recreation areas in southern Michigan is made obvious by the desire of the Michigan Conservation Department to acquire a large portion of Fort Custer. The Department's tentative plans are to develop this area into a public recreation area. If and when the Conservation
Department succeeds, the experience gained from the development of the Allegan State Forest should serve as a guide.

Intervention on the part of state or Federal Government is sometimes subjected to criticism by people who think local projects should be reserved for private individuals. The Sleeping Bear Dunes is a present-day controversy which centers around this very theme. In southwestern Michigan, there are areas of submarginal land, either lying dormant or futilely being used for farming. Should the Federal Government purchase this land and develop a public recreation area similar to the Allegan State Forest? If the Federal Government had not sponsored the Allegan Land Project it is doubtful that the Allegan State Forest would be in existence today, for it is most unlikely that any form of local funds would have been available for this type of undertaking. Perhaps the crucial element should not be who sponsors a land project but the fact that the land problem is recognised and resolved. Rather than have land stand idle and wasted, the land problem should be analysed and the necessary steps taken to develop its potential. The Allegan Land Project certainly accomplished this. The submarginal land in west-central Allegan County was determined unfit for farming and steps were taken to develop the land for what it was best suited—forestry, wildlife conservation, and recreation. The success of the Allegan Land Project, which resulted in the establishment of the Allegan State
Forest should serve as a repeatable demonstration of proper land use and should be an incentive to local, county, and state officials to effect similar adjustments in the future.
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