

Attention, Please, for Quetico-Superior

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TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN YEARS ago this summer the French Canadian, Verendrye, arrived by canoe at Grand Portage on Lake Superior. His eldest son, seventeen, and a nephew, twenty-one, with nothing but an Indian birch-bark map for guidance, continued across the nine-mile carry to Pigeon River and over the low divide into the waters flowing westward to Rainy Lake. On that lake, among friendly Indians, they built a small fort and camped for the winter.

It was a land to delight the hearts of young men. Limitless forests of evergreen with a sprinkling of hardwoods made a separate world of the far-flung web of lakes and streams. Waterfalls and rapids tumbled headlong out of the rock-bound wilderness toward the friendly meeting place of all of

these waters in Rainy Lake. The native Ojibways dressed in skins and furs and lived upon wild rice, berries, fish, wildfowl, rabbits, bear, moose and caribou.

Today, more than two centuries later, the region is still a land for young men above all, for pioneers, for those who love hardihood, self-reliance and adventure in a heroic setting. The young in heart go there from all over the continent for health and inspiration. In spite of shameful scars of reckless plundering by man, it is a region of vast unoccupied spaces, pure waters, wild beauty, and the peace that goes with a profusion of natural flora and fauna. Lying as it does, in midcontinent only 500 miles from Chicago, it is no wonder that for fifteen years the national bodies of both the Amer-

Sunrise in the border lakeland of Minnesota-Ontario.

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ican Legion and the Canadian Legion have asked that the canoe waters traversed by young Verendrye in 1731, together with their tributaries in both Minnesota and Ontario, shall be protected so far as possible in their natural state, and dedicated by treaty as an international memorial to the service men of both countries. The proposal applied originally to the veterans of the First World War but is now being urged for the present comrades as well.

This is known as the Quetico-Superior program. It seeks to take a ten million acre lakeland composed of an estimated 15,000 connected lakes lying in two countries, and by consent of the interested governments, to administer it under identical principles of conservation for the common good. Each side would act under its own established agencies without sacrifice of sovereignty or jurisdiction.

The program recognizes the importance of the fast-vanishing American wilderness

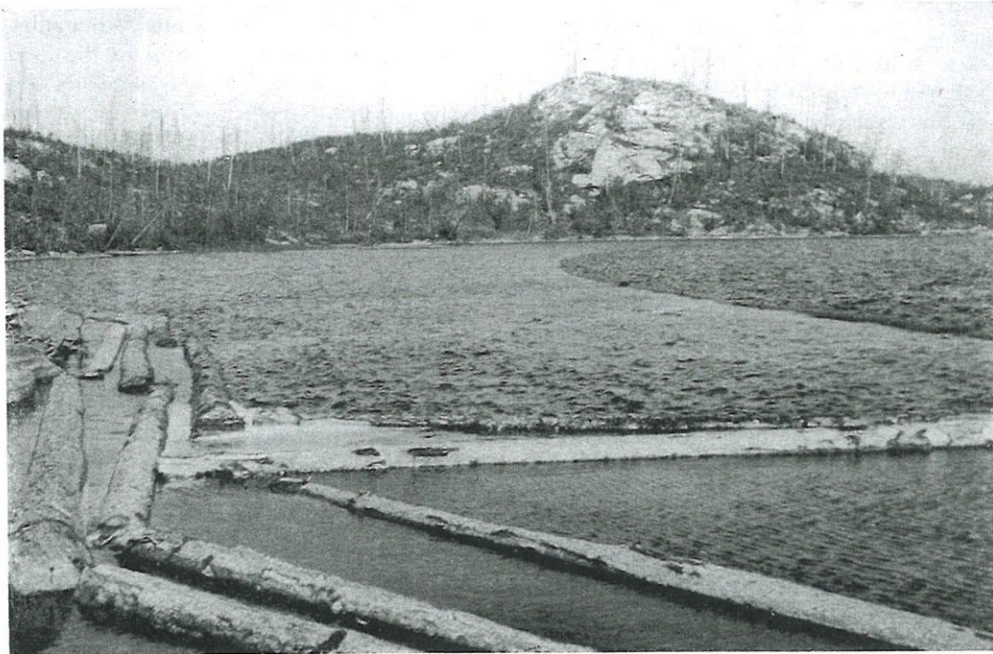
to human welfare. To maintain wilderness against outside encroachments in this machine age, the area must be of large size and off the beaten track. Here is an area of adequate size and unrivalled physical attraction, which at the same time is unsuited for either agriculture or settlement. It lies close to great centers of population and is threaded with natural waterways for travel.

The plan does not ignore the long established uses for the timber, wildlife, fish and furbearers of the area. These will remain undisturbed, but under public regulation to guard against depletion, defilement and abuse of all sorts. Waterpower already developed, as at International Falls on Rainy River, would not be curtailed; but further damming and alteration of water levels in the area itself would be forbidden because of the devastating effect on wildlife and natural beauty.

This plan, if carried out, would reverse the present wasteful liquidation of the re-

Much of the Quetico-Superior wilderness has already been ruthlessly logged and burned. It is against further destruction of this kind that the area must be protected.

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Where commercialism has not penetrated, the lakes and watercourses are set amid walls of the encircling forest. Here the finest of outdoor recreation can be had.

gion, restore forests and wildlife, and insure permanent timber industries geared to the productive capacity of the area. It would merely require that natural products be taken according to a unified public plan designed to minimize waste and fire hazard, safeguard adequate reserves, restore wrecked areas, and give paramount recognition to wilderness recreation on the lakes and streams. Local industry would be served by a dependable supply of raw materials, and the humblest citizen would be protected in his share of the wilderness.

The program, launched in November, 1927, was made necessary by the unbridled destruction of forests, wildlife, and natural beauty resulting from public lack of knowledge. The incident that started public action was the proposal of a private plan for waterpower expansion, that threatened the main lakes of the border and eventually the larger tributaries. Rainy Lake, with its hundreds of wooded islands, was to become the enlarged reservoir for this development.

Since 1909, there had been established in

the center of the lakeland, two public forest reserves of one million acres each—Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario and Superior National Forest in Minnesota. While they embraced only about one fifth of the total area, they were the logical agencies for carrying out the Quetico-Superior objectives. In Ontario the lands were already owned by the Province. Here it would simply be a matter of expanding Quetico Park by a stroke of the pen. In Minnesota, by sad contrast, most of the lands had long since passed into private hands. Unified public control required their repurchase. The only agency capable of performing this task was the U. S. Forest Service, which was already expanding Superior National Forest. The necessary approval was secured from Secretary of Agriculture Jardine in November, 1927.

In 1929 the Minnesota legislature, on recommendation of Governor Christianson, memorialized Congress by joint resolution to pass legislation forbidding further damming of lakes and streams in the border

watershed of Cook, Lake and St. Louis counties, and to establish a recreational policy for that area, protecting wooded shores, islands, beaches, waterfalls and rapids. In July, 1930, the measure known as the Shipstead-Newton-Nolan bill passed Congress without a dissenting vote. In both the legislature and Congress the battles had been as bitter as any in history. Counter bills purporting to do the same thing in more reasonable fashion had been introduced by representatives of the districts affected, and every known strategy had been used to discredit, compromise, delay and block passage of the legislation. The result was an unheard-of defeat for the groups that had so long controlled the destiny of the border lakeland and a shining victory for conservation.

That did not mean, however, that the Quetico-Superior project was by any means accomplished or assured. Public ownership of the available forest lands in the area was the first indispensable step. The Act of July, 1930, carried no appropriation for special acquisition. This gave the opposing industrial groups an opportunity which they have pursued relentlessly ever since. The strategy has been, in spite of the Congressional declaration of policy, to prevent the necessary public ownership and to limit the area under effective control.

In the Minnesota legislature in 1933 an innocent sounding bill was passed without fanfare, setting up on paper fourteen state forests, the boundaries of which were described at length at the end of the bill. The forests were located principally in cut-over areas of predominantly private ownership. They carried no funds and were predicated chiefly on the vague hope of tax forfeiture.

Two of these prospective forests, it turned out, were located in the very area which Secretary Jardine had promised to consolidate and which were covered by the Shipstead-Nolan Act. One was at the east end of Superior National Forest, separating it from Grand Portage Indian Reservation which occupies the northeastern tip of the state. The other was at the west end and included

Kabetogama and Rainy lakes, the two largest bodies of water in the region, and the ones where the power company was most eager for additional storage of water.

The effect of this legislation became clear a few years later, when greatly enlarged appropriations at Washington for the general purchase of forest lands gave the U. S. Forest Service a chance to buy working control in the whole lakeland area. The trouble was that the Conservation Department of Minnesota objected. The Forest Service would not and could not go ahead at the two ends of Superior National Forest without state approval. Conservation groups of the state united in demanding that the state abandon its dog-in-the-manger policy, but it was not until 1935, after intervention by Governor Olson, that the Commission reversed itself and invited the Forest Service to proceed. The National Forest Reservation Commission at Washington officially authorized the two Purchase Units in the north in 1936, but meantime the money had been spent elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Forest Service, with the comparatively meager funds available between 1936 and 1942, acquired some 189,000 acres of land in these two purchase units—or twenty-two percent of the total.

In 1942 state officials suddenly reversed their policy again and refused to permit the Forest Service to proceed in the two purchase units. This policy was reenforced in the 1943 legislature by two bills which, taken together, limit the Forest Service to purchases in the original Superior National Forest. On the one side were ranged all the conservation groups of the state except one sportsmens' club of St. Paul, of which an active state official was former president. The measures, however, were sponsored by the state administration and had the enthusiastic support of the spokesmen for the local industries.

State officials have thus not only created another stalemate in the essential completion of Superior National Forest within the lakeland area, but are now carrying on an insistent campaign to restrict and alter the Quetico-Superior program.

The result of all this policy is clearly evident in the so-called Kabetogama peninsula which lies between Kabetogama Lake and Rainy Lake on the north. The whole area is privately owned. When the state blocked possible purchase of these lands in the early thirties, the owners sold the timber and, after the logging, fire swept the area, until a great part of it was left bare. When the U. S. Forest Service tried again to buy it in 1942 in order to fulfill the Quetico-Superior program, the Governor refused permission, and instead, an option was taken on all the land, some 50,000 acres, by the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company—the concern that from the start has most vigorously opposed the Quetico-Superior program. The M. and O. Paper Company has thus, to all practical purposes, become the final arbiter of what is to be done in this region.

The situation speaks for itself. Lessons of the past are again and again ignored. Old habits persist. There is always some “plausible” reason for delay. Then it is said to be too late to act because there is nothing left.

Fortunately, the shores of Kabetogama peninsula are still largely green. Replanting in time by some qualified agency can help to bring back the forest of the interior where there are several small lakes. It is in its relation to the recreational plan that the peninsula plays its chief role. There are still only a few scattered settlers along the shore and no mechanized developments at all. Except for its forests, the peninsula preserves the wild character of the rest of the region and affords a bulwark against unfavorable encroachments. These lower lakes already have a very large recreational use. Rainy, the largest of all, and famous for its islands, is the hub of the canoe routes and of the public enjoyment of the region. Without Rainy, the border lakeland would be like a wounded bird.

There is no question about the sentiment

of the people of Minnesota. Twice they have been blocked in the essential public consolidation of the lands in this region. The first time, after long effort, they overcame the obstruction. I believe they will overcome it again. Unified public control is prerequisite, and there is no way to get it except through Superior National Forest.

The solution lies in wide publicity and increased public understanding. In a program so large and many-sided as Quetico-Superior, requiring as it does the collaboration of State and Union, Province and Dominion, there are plenty of natural difficulties, but none that cannot be overcome. The difficulties indicate the greatness of the plan.

What can be done when the people are sufficiently aroused, has been significantly demonstrated by the recent action of the legislature in the neighboring state of Michigan in appropriating a million dollars to purchase outright and for keeps the remaining hardwood forest of the Porcupine Mountains. In the midst of war, with all its costs, anxieties and sacrifices, Michigan had the power and the courage to speak decisively for the future before it was too late. It is not too late to apply the different remedy needed in Minnesota.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Fear has been expressed by some people that it is planned eventually to make a national park of the Superior Wilderness. Such fear is, of course, due to the fact that if the area were made a national park, its timber and other natural resources could no longer be utilized. The attitude of the National Parks Association toward such a proposal is that the region, first of all, does not measure up to national park standards; and, second, most of its forests have already been cut and are, therefore, not fit for inclusion in a national park. The Association, however, does approve of the carrying out of the Quetico-Superior plan as discussed in the foregoing article.