

The Gogebic County Forest System 1943 – 2008

The Beginning

The Gogebic County forest system was formally established on July 22, 1943. Under the provision of the Municipal Forestry Act (P.A. 217 of 1931) the Gogebic County Board of Supervisors created a Forestry Commission to supervise the management of forest lands received from the State of Michigan. Under this act, these forest lands were comprised of tax delinquent parcels within the county that had reverted back into state ownership.

Through an agreement reached between the State of Michigan, the U.S. Forest Service and Gogebic County, initial boundaries of the forest were established during 1943. A program to deed these tax-reverted lands, within these boundaries, over to the county was then begun. The deeds for these lands contained two restrictions. One, should these lands be used for anything except forestry purposes, they would revert back to state ownership. Two, it prohibited the selling of these lands by the county.

While approximately fifty percent of the present 50,000-acre county forest system was received in this manner, the county actually purchased its first forest land in 1941 with the acquisition of 400 acres of virgin timber.

This was followed in 1942 when General Motors Corporation, who was leaving the area, very cooperatively sold the county 3,240 acres of selectively cut timber on a part pay-part donation basis for \$1.50 per acre.

The county forest system was again enlarged in 1944 with the addition of about 10,000 acres of forest land from the Mosinee Paper Mill

Company who was also leaving the area. This land was purchased at a price of 75 cents per acre. Again, it was on a part pay-part donation basis.

Management Units

The county forest management units, namely the Ironwood Township, Erwin-Bessemer Townships, and Wakefield Township units, were carefully chosen for the following reasons:

-Protection of Deer Yards – County ownership guaranteed their permanence and an abundant supply of food for deer herds, as well as providing cover for other game animals.

-Protection of Watersheds – An important



A winter deer yard in Gogebic County

consideration was that of protecting the headwaters of the three principal trout streams in the western end of the county, i.e., the Montreal, Black and Presque Isle Rivers and their associated feeder streams.

-Protection and Enhancement of Tourist Industry - Since Gogebic County was blessed many fine lakes and streams for fishing, excellent hunting areas, and had many scenic waterfalls on its principal rivers, it was felt that a

need existed to protect those areas to enhance the recreational opportunities that they offered.

- Water Conservation and Prevention of Floods – County ownership of land in the Erwin-Bessemer unit gave the county the opportunity to regulate the flow of the McDonald and Black Rivers by the creation of dams on each of these streams. These dams have prevented annual flooding that had occurred in the area, and they have resulted in the creation of two fine reservoirs that not only contain an ample supply of water which keeps the level of the streams fairly constant, they also have provided excellent fishing for trout and panfish.

-Proximity to Population Center – The forest units were chosen because of their proximity to the three largest towns of the county. Lumber camps as such had disappeared with most woods workers traveling to and from their jobs in the woods on a daily basis. It was felt that the proximity of the forest would aid in its development and utilization.

-Future Income to the County – Since mining was already beginning to recede in the county and tax revenues would be shrinking, it was felt that the county forest system would in the future provide income to the county to offset the expected reduced tax revenues.

-Selective Cutting of the Forest – The strongest consideration was to demonstrate by precept and example that selective cutting was practical (commercial clear cuts in northern hardwoods were still quite common at the time), and that forests

under proper management, could be made to produce unending supplies of forest products, constantly increasing in quality.

-Forest Products and Employment – Those concerned with the forest were mindful that a county forest system would materially assist in supplying sawlogs to local mills and also mine timber to local mines. Increased employment was a natural result from having a county forest. It was also felt that if a permanent forest was to be established, which would produce a continuous supply of raw materials, then this could aid in the establishment of some type of larger forest products mill in the county.

In the early stages of the county forest program, the county received much assistance from the U.S. Forest Service and the State Conservation Department. Both provided technical assistance in doing the initial inventory of the county forest lands and preparing plans for the future development of the forestry program.

The Forestry and Parks Commission

The first County Forester was hired in 1950. His name was Emil Sabol. In 1952, Lloyd Leppanen was appointed County Forester and served until 1977 when he retired from county service. Richard Bolen served as County Forester from 1978 – 2000. In 2001 with the addition of county park responsibilities, the Forestry Commission became the Forestry and Parks Commission and Bolen became the Director of Forestry and Parks.

The Forestry and Parks Commission is a completely self-sustaining unit of county government. Not only does the Commission pay its own way, it also disburses to the General Fund of the county a financial appropriation annually. The Commission also pays a portion of its income in payment in lieu of taxes to the individual townships based on acreage. The Commission's revenues are obtained solely from timber sales, the sale of gravel, and Special Use Permits. Since its inception, the Forestry and Parks Commission has

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An assortment of Sugar Maple Sawimber harvested from Gogebic County Forest Lands

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turned over to the General Fund of the County, over 2.9 million dollars in revenues (1.1 million in the last five years), which have been used to support other county operations and projects.

Note: The current members of the Forestry and Parks Commission are Thomas Gerovac, Steve Thomas, Bob Schonberg, Dan Siirila and George Peterson III. Staff members include: Dick Bolen, Mark Bale, Jim Maki and Judy Kichak.

Years of Progress

The county forest lands have improved considerably over the last 65 years. Much progress has been made in taking the once denuded forest lands and with proper long-term management, developing them towards their full potential. The Gogebic County forest system is an excellent example of how through local



Left to Right: Dick Bolen, Mark Bale, Judy Kichak and Jim Maki

leadership and direction, forest land can be utilized under the “multiple use management concept” to provide a continuous supply of forest products, while still insuring uses for wildlife, watershed protection, wilderness, and recreation. In the final analysis our efforts will be judged by only one measure and that is how we left the land. We can make a difference – we can use the land but not abuse it and in the end leave it better than we found it.

What makes this really unique is that in the state of Michigan only Gogebic County, through the wisdom of its county leaders, had the foresight to develop a program of this nature that has provided its citizens with forest related benefits for over six decades and will continue to do so long into the future. The following is a synopsis of programs administered by staff of the Forestry and Parks Commission.

Note: Several other counties in the U.P. have county forest land. Marquette County is second to Gogebic County with 12,000 acres.

Timber Sale Program

The timber sale program is the financial cornerstone of the entire forestry program. Annual harvests are done based on the long-term timber management plan, which is part of the overall comprehensive plan for the forest. Since its inception, county forest timber sales have provided the equivalent of 193-million board ft. of various forest products for the regions wood using industries. The stumpage value of this wood exceeds 7.5 million dollars. If viewed in real economic terms, the timber program has generated 53 million dollars into the regions economy. Wise and prudent decisions concerning the continued development and harvesting of Gogebic County timber resources will help to provide jobs, encourage forest related recreation activities and do its share to sustain the economic health and quality of life in Gogebic County.



Recreation Programs

County Parks

The Forestry Commission assumed administrative responsibilities of the two county parks in 2001. Each park operates as an independent profit center and is responsible for paying all its annual operating costs in addition to generating a measure of net revenue that is placed into a park capital improvement fund for future park projects. A description of each park follows:

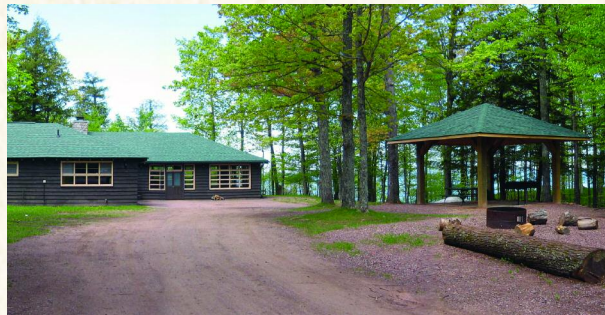
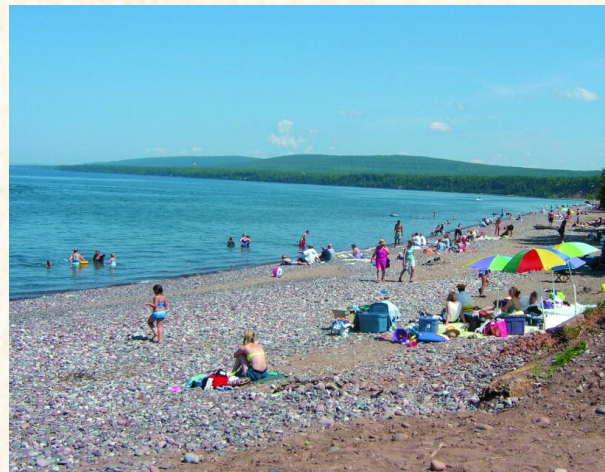
Lake Gogebic Park

The park encompasses 133 acres and is located at the south end of Lake Gogebic, which is the largest inland lake in the Upper Peninsula. The park offers modern camping with 53 sites, a boat launching facility, and a public fishing dock. There is a day use area for swimming and picnicking, and also includes a playground and pavilion. The park annual camping occupancy rate exceeds 70%.



Little Girl's Point

The 275-acre park is located on the shores of Lake Superior at Little Girl's Point in Ironwood Township. It offers 32 sites for camping, a mile of beach for swimming, sunbathing, agate collection, and a day use area for picnicking with a pavilion. A D.N.R. boat launch is located at the west end of the park. This park is known for its unparalleled views of summertime sunsets on Lake Superior. Its annual camping occupancy rate is over 60%.



The Lodge at Little Girl's Point

The Lodge is located on the shoreline overlooking Lake Superior within the boundaries of Little Girl's Point Park. It was built in the late 1930's and has been used for 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts, and family activities since the 1950's. It is also home to Camp Superior, an outdoor educational program held each spring for area 6th graders. It offers a 40-bed dorm, modern kitchen facilities and a large dining room with a unique

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fireplace. The facility also has an outdoor barbecue cooking pavilion. It is believed to be the only public facility of this type on the U.S. side of Lake Superior.

Additional Recreational Programs

Powers Road Recreational Area

This scenic road through classic sugar maple forests feature over 15 miles of signed multiple-use trails, a 1 mile interpretive trail, 10 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, 5 scenic vistas, an SAF auto tour route and a popular autumn color tour route (charter buses, etc.)



*The Montreal River Gorge,
located in the Powers Road Recreational Area*

McDonald Dam Recreational Area

This 440-acre impoundment features a unique wilderness setting that has 3 pack-in tenting sites and 3 remote island tenting sites (free to the public on a first come, first serve basis).



Anglers at McDonald Lake

In addition, a fishing dock and a catwalk across the impoundment provide shoreline fishing opportunities. Also included are a boat ramp and a day use area.

Partnerships

Ruffed Grouse Society

One of the longest and most beneficial partnerships the county has is with the RGS-Superior Chapter. The relationship dates back to 1989 when the county worked closely with the local chapter to obtain its first RGS grant for Aspen regeneration work on the county forest lands. To date, several thousand acres have received a post timber sale cultural treatment to insure the successful regeneration of Aspen. This has been accomplished in part with strong financial support from RGS. In addition, RGS funding was instrumental in developing several miles of hunter walking trails. RGS funding has also been used to purchase some hunter walking trail maintenance equipment. The Forestry and Parks Commission sincerely values the strong commitment by RGS in assisting the county in its conservation initiatives and for helping to provide opportunities to maintain the hunting tradition on the county forest lands.



*Hook Lake Aspen regeneration, supported by
the Ruffed Grouse Society*

A decorative border of tree branches with green moss and lichen frames the page. The branches are positioned at the top, bottom, and right edges, creating a natural, organic frame around the text.

Economic Development – Local Units of Government

Gogebic County has been a long and committed supporter to economic development and has used its land base and timber resources to foster business development where appropriate. Its first such commitment occurred in the late 1960's when a proposed plywood plant utilizing aspen was being negotiated with local officials. The plant would be located in Bessemer and would provide over 250 jobs in area forests and at the newly constructed plant. At the time the county was at the end of the iron mining era and the jobs were sorely needed. The County Board was asked to help provide a stable wood supply for the operation. The Forestry Commission responded and negotiated a 10 yr. stumpage commitment with the new corporation, which would be known as the Ironwood Products Corporation. The commitment was renewed once more in 1979 but unfortunately Ironwood Products went out of business in the early 1980's. Fortunately, another firm came in shortly thereafter. The new firm known as Bessemer Plywood has run a successful operation and has been an important part of the area's economy ever since. (Bessemer Plywood has not operated under any type of a stumpage commitment from the county.) It is note worthy to indicate that had it not been for the early and solid stumpage commitment by the county, the original operation would not have begun here. At the time the long-term stumpage commitment was the first of its kind in Michigan.

Another initiative that Gogebic County played a significant role in was providing a land base for business development in the Wakefield Township Renaissance Zone. In the 1990's, Michigan enacted legislation to foster economic development by providing tax-free economic development zones throughout the state. A zone was set up in Wakefield Township, but in order to promote economic development opportunities a building needed to be constructed and utilities and road

access had to be in place. Through a unique partnership, the Lac View Desert tribe at Watersmeet, Wakefield Township and the county reached a historic agreement whereby the tribe would provide funding for the building, the township would seek public grants for infrastructure improvements and the county would provide land to site the development. Today, the Renaissance Zone is the site of Extreme Tool and Engineering, a leading provider of mold design, engineering and manufacturing services. The firm employs over 50 people with high paying jobs.

Other Partnerships

The Forestry and Parks Commission also enjoys strong partnerships with the Gogebic Range Snowmobile Trail Authority, the Gogebic Conservation District, MSU Cooperative Extension, Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources, the Ottawa National Forest, the Wisconsin County Forest Association, and forest industry. All of these partners have played a special role in that each adds to services and benefits the Forestry and Parks Commission is able to provide to the citizens of Gogebic County.

Gogebic County Natural Resources Center

In 2007, a historic decision was made by the County Board of Commissioners to purchase the USDA-Forest Service Bessemer Ranger District administrative site in Bessemer. Negotiations for the purchase began in 2006 pursuant to the Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Act of 2005. The 3.79 acre parcel had been in Forest Service ownership since 1936, and with the passage of the 2005 Act, the Ottawa National Forest staff decided to offer to Gogebic County the opportunity for a direct sale purchase. The County and the Forest Service had a long and mutually beneficial relationship and it was the hope of the

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Forest Service that the County would be able to purchase the facility and keep it in a natural resource use. Up to this point the Forestry and Parks personnel had been located in the County Courthouse.



The facility, located 1 block north of the Courthouse, offers the following: An office building constructed in 1985 which has a total of 2,464 square feet of enclosed office space on two floors; a warehouse/garage that was constructed in 1936 which, is a two-story building with a total of 4,480 square feet of enclosed building area. It is used for vehicle and equipment storage. In addition a 2,028 square foot garage constructed in 1987 features six vehicle bays. Finally, the facility has a hazardous material storage building constructed in 1936 that has 240 square feet of storage area. The site is an extremely attractive building complex, which is nestled in a grove of red pine, white spruce and sugar maple trees.

Negotiations on the purchase culminated with the transfer of ownership on October 31, 2007. The purchase price was \$225,000 and was paid for in part by an appropriation of \$188,200 from the Forestry and Parks Commission with the balance coming from the General Fund of the county. No outside funding was needed for the purchase.

It was the desire of the County Board and the hope of the Forestry and Parks Commission to create a home for natural resource type agencies that could essentially provide “one stop shopping” for citizens needing natural resource assistance. As of October 1, 2008, the facility is

now home for Michigan State University Cooperative Extension, the Gogebic County Forestry and Parks Commission, the Gogebic Conservation District, the County Soil Erosion and Sedimentation program and the County Survey and Remonumentation program. All of these agencies and programs offer services that now can be accessed from this one facility.

A sign was erected in July of 2008, which identifies the facility now as the “Gogebic County Natural Resources Center”. It is believed that at the county level no other county in Michigan has a single facility that offers so many natural resources services for its citizens. This purchase is truly a dream come true for all who believed this type of facility was needed. Certainly, this would not have happened without the strong support of the Ottawa National Forest to keep the facility in its intended use. In addition, the Forestry and Parks Commission as well as county board leadership was critical in moving the project to culmination. A long time local realtor put the purchase in these words: “In my 54 years as a real estate agent, this was absolutely the best purchase I’ve ever seen and I am happy that the County Board had the wisdom and excellent judgment in buying it”.



MISSION STATEMENT

We have a responsibility and a long term commitment to wisely use and improve the County Forest and Parks in such a way that helps sustain the economic health and quality of life in Gogebic County today while insuring that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to enjoy the benefits of our labor. ▲



GOGEBIC COUNTY FORESTRY AND PARKS COMMISSION

1943 – 2008 “65 Years of Progress and Growth”

Authority: Created under authority of P.A. 217 of 1931 - Municipal Forestry Act, now Part 527, Municipal Forests, of Public Act 451 of 1994, the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. Organized on July 22, 1943 by Gogebic County Board of Supervisors.

Type of Administration: 5 member Forestry and Parks Commission. Appointed by Gogebic County Board of Commissioners.

County General Fund Budget Allocation: None – completely self-supporting.

Land Base: As of 12/31/07 a total of 50,290.39 acres were under the jurisdiction of the Gogebic County Forestry and Parks Commission. The County has timber rights on an additional 374 acres.

Timber Type of Acreage: Aspen (5968), Mixed Conifer (6238), Red Pine and Jack Pine (135), Lowland Hardwoods (2622), Tamarack (86), Cedar (2695), Hemlock (285), Upland Spruce/Fir (889), Northern Hardwoods (28,622).

Total Timber Harvested Since Creation: 33,344,926 bd. ft. of Sawtimber; 318,681 cords of Pulpwood

Total Forestry and Parks Revenues: \$9,568,335

Total Forestry and Parks Expenditures: \$9,289,191

Total Stumpage Dollars Generated: \$7,597,839

Total Appropriation to County General Fund: (2004 - 2008) - \$1,118,200

Total Dollar Expenditures to Other Public Entities: Soil Survey, Range Trail Authority, EDC, Courthouse Building, Road Commission - \$161,600

Total Dollars Invested into Land Improvements: (Includes roads – gravel pit development – Aspen Regeneration) - \$355,851.

Total Dollars Invested into Land Purchases: \$119,224

Total Acreages Treated (2004 – 2008):

1. Marked Hardwoods4,513
2. Aspen463
3. Conifer58
Total5,034

Average Annual Harvest (2004 – 2008): 5,374,500 bd. ft. various products or
736,000 bd. ft. Sawtimber and
9,277 cords Pulpwood

Average Annual Income (2004 – 2008): \$525,689

No. of Miles of County Forest Roads (Maintained): 30

No. of Miles of Multiple Use Trails (Maintained): 15

No. of Lakes Within County Forest Boundaries: 5

No. of Miles of Trout Streams Flowing Thru County Forest: 24

No. of County Parks: 3 - Little Girl's Point, Lake Gogebic, McDonald Lake

Total Dollar Expenditures to Rebuild Parks (2001 – 2008): \$602,255 *Includes The Lodge at Little Girl's Point.

Total Income from Campground Operations (2001 – 2008): \$526,946

Total Expenditures from Campground Operations (2001 – 2008): \$489,378

No. of Full Time Employed: 4 - Director of Forestry and Parks, Assistant Director of Forestry and Parks, Forester, and Administrative Secretary.

No Part Time: 2 - Park Managers - Seasonal