

## NATURAL OR SCIENTIFIC AREAS—THREE YEARS LATER

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Three years ago I appeared before this organization and spoke on "Natural or Scientific Areas: An Illinois Resource." The conditions I described at that time were indeed dark. I wish I could stand here today and describe only bright conditions. Unfortunately, that is impossible. In some cases they are brighter than three years ago, in others they are darker. First a look at the dark side.

One of the natural areas I discussed was Grand Canyon and Chalk Bluff, possibly the largest snake den in eastern North America. Of this area I said,

"It may be difficult to convince the public that this site should be set aside as a scientific area, because from this place the snakes of many different species spread over the countryside. Many individuals would like to kill all of the snakes. To the biologist that would be a vicious act. Our duty is to see that these animals have their niche in which to live. This place has long served that purpose and it should be

protected and preserved. The area is also of archeological interest, especially the southern extremity of Chalk Bluff. How much of Illinois history lies buried there, no one knows."

Three years ago it was somewhat difficult to reach Chalk Bluff. Today it is not. A broad path, in many places constructed of crushed rock, hurries the visitor through the woods and into Little Grand Canyon. In this beautiful, narrow canyon, steps have been cut into the sandstone and the descent to the valley floor of Grand Canyon is swift and safe, that is, in dry weather. The broad path continues on to Chalk Bluff where picnic tables and restroom facilities greet the visitor. A picnic area at the most famous snake den of eastern North America! It is a mile from the parking area to the base of Chalk Bluff. I seriously doubt if many picnickers will carry their food and drink such a distance.

Unless an auto road comes into the area from the south, access is possible only by hiking or by boat on the Big Muddy River. If the picnic tables and rest facilities were placed for the benefit of boating on the Big Muddy, I would suggest that an area of this type be developed on the west side of the river, about one mile downstream, where access both by boat and automobile are possible.

In one of the tributary ravines of Grand Canyon, some digging had been done and a mass of bones, possibly Indian, remained along the path.

Will this area be protected and preserved?

Pine Hills, some distance south of Chalk Bluff, has been subjected to much "improvement". The road is being improved for better and swifter travel. Numerous parking areas have been or are being constructed. Broad paths have been built and these lead into areas that were once known only to the more adventurous person who dreaded neither greenbriers nor brambles. At Government Rock a path traverses the small hill prairie. The exotic Russian olive had been planted in the prairie but, I have heard, these have been removed. At McGee Hill, the brow slope of the bluff has been cleared of almost all of the trees and shrubbery. Crushed stone paths were constructed but apparently surface run-off was not considered as the water from the parking area is washing the crushed rock from the trail downslope toward the cliff. Let us hope no "improvements" are planned in the ravines and in the swamp.

In my address in 1961, I said:

"Presently the University of Illinois Foundation owns land in Mason County, some of which is sand prairie and forest. The University is preserving 640 acres of this land as a scientific area. This is a great service to both scientists and laymen."

The Foundation has not yet converted this 640 acres of sand prairie and forest into a scientific area.

The lack of money is still one of the dark parts of the picture. If funds were forthcoming, many important areas could be purchased and protected. Many of us had great hopes that money would become available through an increase in the cigarette tax. The General Assembly passed legislation which would have increased this tax and a portion of it would have been used for land acquisition, including nature preserves. The act was vetoed by the Governor because of a campaign pledge he made in 1960.

It is possible for me to go on with dark side. There are, however, a few bright spots that keep me from becoming too depressed.

A few years ago one of the best scientific areas in northern Illinois was in great danger. Pressure was exerted by a group to convert the nature area of Illinois Beach State Park to a golf course. The marshes, dunes, and sand prairie of this state park are of great biological importance. We have with Beach a good example of what persons interested in preservation of irreplaceable resources can accomplish. They did not sit idly by but diligently and vigorously went to work. Because of their activities, the area concerned is still a nature area in the park. Soon, we hope, it will be officially designated as a nature pre-

serve under supervision of the Nature Preserves Commission.

The Nature Conservancy and its Illinois Chapter have made progress. In 1961, Volo and Wauconda bogs and Rocky Branch had been or were being purchased. Presently a Sangamon River valley woods, known as Hart Woods, located near Mahomet in Champaign County, is being purchased and preserved. In northern Illinois negotiations are underway for the purchase of several valuable scientific areas. One of these is desired by an auto wrecking company as site for "junking" old automobiles. From progress reports I have heard, such a blight on this important site will not develop.

For a number of years an area in northwestern Cook County attracted the attention of those interested in prairie. This gravel hill had been disturbed by removal of some gravel. Presently it supports a beautiful prairie. Fear was always with us that the prairie would be destroyed by more gravel removal or by use of the hill for homesites. We were especially concerned during the planning stages of the toll road. It was constructed to the north of the prairie. The Cook County Forest Preserve in its purchase of land in the vicinity included the prairie. Doubtless this valuable prairie stand will be preserved as a part of the Forest Preserve system.

You may recall that the Academy in 1961 passed a resolution favoring legislation dealing with the establishment of nature preserves. When the bill received the approval of the various legislative committees and when it passed both houses by unanimous vote, many of us had great

hopes. When the Governor vetoed the bill we were very disappointed. During the last session of the General Assembly the task began again. I am happy to report that Illinois now has a Nature Preserves Commission.

The Nature Preserves Commission has nine members who are appointed by the Governor upon the advice of the Chief of the Illinois Natural History Survey and the Director of the Illinois State Museum. The Commission approves or disapproves the acquisition or disposal by the Department of Conservation of any interest in real property for purposes set forth in an act dealing with state parks and nature preserves. The Commission formulates policies for selection, acquisition, management, and protection of nature preserves and it maintains "registries and records of nature preserves and other areas of education or scientific value and of habitats for rare and endangered species of plants and animals in the State."

The legislature in the last regular session also amended the laws relative to State Parks to include nature preserves.

The Nature Preserves Commission was appointed by Governor Kerner. Their first meeting was held on January 30. At that meeting Dr. S. Charles Kendeigh and Mr. George Fell were elected chairman and secretary respectively. The second meeting of the Commission was held on March 19 and the next is to be in May. After attending the March meeting, I feel this Commission is very sincere and devoted to

the acquisition and preservation of nature areas in Illinois.

Can we now lean back and rest? Absolutely not! Until we are absolutely sure that the valuable and

scientific areas are secure we can never rest. Whether or not this security is accomplished depends upon the continued support of interested persons in Illinois.