

RECREATIONAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

AS ILLUSTRATED BY
CHOPAWAMSI, VIRGINIA

Being Developed by the
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RECREATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Today, for the first time in its history, the federal government is actively engaged in cooperating with the states and their subdivisions in the selection, acquisition, development and administration of outdoor recreation areas. It is a new Federal aid project, taking its place beside the Federal Aid Highway program and the protection of national forests. It demonstrates that federal, state and local governments have come to realize that providing outdoor recreational facilities for the use and enjoyment of all people is a major public responsibility.

This cooperation in recreational development is taking several forms. The national parks are having their recreational facilities increased and improved; hundreds of new state parks, county parks, and metropolitan parks are being developed; and the larger, more congested population centers are being supplied organized camping areas of considerable size adequate to the needs of all classes. In this last phase of the program the Federal government has participated in the selection, acquisition and development of land for both recreational land use projects, located where they will be of greatest use to the masses, in large cities and industrial areas.

The cooperation of two Federal agencies is making this program possible. Funds have been advanced by the Resettlement Administration to buy and develop areas of land which are now either devoted to unsuccessful farming, or are lying idle and wasted. The National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, is supervising the field work of selecting the project areas and of converting old farms and woodland into recreation grounds, with cabins, lakes, picnic areas, and miles of forest trails.

46 of these recreation land use projects are now under development in 24 states. They are located within a half-day's round trip distance of 30,000,000 people. The work of developing these areas for their future use is being carried on by 14,000 relief workers and 6,000 workers of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC enrollees are under general supervision of Robert Fechner, Director of the Emergency Conservation Work Program.

The areas include highways "waysides" of about 20 acres and tracts of from 5,000 to 20,000 acres near the largest cities. Approximately 450,000 acres purchased with Federal funds at an average cost of \$10.00 an acre, are scheduled for recreational development. They are newcomers to the recreation field – part of a recreational awakening.

The areas are being developed on land not being put to its highest social use – land, unprofitable to farm due to lack of fertility, erosion, and misuse; land, which, because of its location, attains greater social and economic importance when dedicated to the recreation needs of congested populations.

The location and planning of these projects are allied with the Service's program to develop a nationwide system of state, local, and metropolitan parks in 47 states with CCC companies, but there is no intention to use them in the place of state parks or as competitors to state parks. They are simply vitally needed adjuncts to these parks, providing facilities for low-cost recreation in the form of organized camps – a special service to the cities' low-income groups.

In planning and developing the new areas, the National Park Service and the Resettlement Administration are cooperating with the state, county, and local parks and conservation authorities and welfare and social agencies. Operating through expert planners in its field offices, the Park Service surveys the public needs, chooses the desired locations, investigates the land, secures options, recommends purchase and plans the development.

When the land becomes Federal property, the next move is to obtain a CCC company or WPA labor and begin work on a development plan which has been carefully drawn during formative days. The purpose is to provide adequate, quickly accessible recreation spots for the massed millions in American cities, thereby adding to the utility and value of the nation's land resources.

ORGANIZED RECREATION

As the National Parks are places unattainable to certain millions, so even most State parks are beyond the horizons of many from the lower-income strata; and the bringing of outdoor recreation within their reach is the object of this program. Because of the financial status of these people it has been found that their recreation must be organized to insure economic vacations.

In accordance with the size of the area – most of them contain from a few to several thousand acres – there are planned a number of organized camps. Each camp will service a maximum of 150 people and will be divided into units, each accommodating not more than 30 people. A typical organized camp consists of a central kitchen and dining hall, a central wash and toilet

house, an administrative buildings, staff quarters, service buildings and water and sewage facilities. The individual units of a camp consist of tents or shelters according to climate, a unit lodge with outdoor kitchen; a unit wash house and latrine.

The units operate individually under the supervision of trained counselors, and most meals are served from the central kitchen in the central dining-room. Though varying in construction range, the overnight shelter is usually a frame building, screed and protected to meet local weather conditions. Four to eight campers occupy each shelter. These are provided for mothers and tots, boys, girls, women and men, to meet the needs of the social and welfare organizations of communities. Each type of camp has a definite purpose to serve and does so under the personal supervision of trained camp directors and counselors.

Inasmuch as this cooperative program is directed not only at the increase of recreation facilities, it is benefiting the local areas in which projects are located as well as the surrounding industrial population centers.

First comes the development program whereby 14,000 relief clients living in the project localities are given employment in improving the areas. These men represent the quota assigned to recreational projects from the total of 55,000 men which the Resettlement Administration has put to work on its broader land use program. The development of these lands not only increased employment opportunities in rural areas, but has also initiated a constructive form of public work – improvement of the land for wider public use.

Families who have in the past been living on the purchased areas are in many cases in dire circumstances because of the poverty of the land, and the exhaustion of forest and mineral resources which formerly gave them jobs. Their future is one of the primary concerns of the Resettlement Administration which is helping thousands of stranded families to move to better farms. Either through carefully planned rehabilitation loans, or through assistance in purchasing new farms on land of assured value, the families residing on the project areas are being helped to achieve better opportunities to make a satisfactory living. Many will of course be permanently aided by the part-time employment associated with the maintenance of the recreation lands or arising from the increase in tourist traffic to the localities where projects are situated.

DOUBLE PROGRAM

A program of dual value is thus being perfected. Families of low-salaried and wage-earning men in the centers of dense populations are having playgrounds on reclaimed land which other men find unsuited for farming, and these farmers are to be transplanted to fertile ground or rehabilitated where they stand. The people of the cities are to have, without cost, a share of the good earth and the health and happiness that goes with it; and poverty-stricken farmers are to have a new chance. The factory workers' leisure days need no longer be spent in the smoke and filth in which, through necessity, they must live to work, and the farmer whose lands have been cut raw by erosion or burned out by one-crop agriculture need no longer scratch his sterile soil.

Typical of the program is a 15,000 acre project in Virginia, 35 miles southwest of Washington near the Washington-Richmond Highway, called Chopawamsic – from the Indian meaning “at the small isolate lodge.” The area comprises one of the nation’s unique historical spots, and is a good example of what the program is trying to accomplish both socially and economically.

Washington, the nation’s capital, though one of the loveliest cities in the world because of its tree-arched streets and unusual park area, despite its variety and quantity of outdoor recreational facilities, has never had an adequate place where the lower-income families might go to rest and play, particularly in the summertime, when life in low-lying Atlantic seaboard cities is not comfortable. Here is the a city of 500,000 – as important as any on earth; marked by magnificence from Virginia’s river flats to Maryland’s hills – yet with no provisions for the simple pleasures and improved health of those who need them most and can afford them least.

In the majority of cases, administration and maintenance of these areas is to be the responsibility of state parks or conservation authorities and the administration of the camps themselves the business of the local welfare agencies, but in the case of Chopawamsic, it will be administered by the National Capitol Parks, the Federal agency which administers the parks in the District of Columbia. Use of the area will not be restricted to the underprivileged of the District; similar groups from Fredericksburg and Alexandria, and the surrounding Virginia countryside may participate.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

In relief, the project area is seen to have four lobate ridges, more or less parallel, individually extending westerly four to seven miles from the Washington-Richmond Highway, and upward from an elevation of 20 ft to 400 ft. Lateral are the main clear-water creeks, and indenting are their many branches – draining in vein-like flow, easterly towards the Potomac River. From positions along the stream beds and their branches, it would appear that one half of the land ran upward in gentle slopes to rolling hills and table land, which the other half would rise rugged and steep, canyon-like, in instances over 100 feet. Many springs are sources of branches. Some of them are unusually large, and the constant flow of pure water becomes a valuable asset upon recreational adaptation of land.

FOREST COVER

Forest cover throughout the area is nearly ideal. Though sawmills frequently have been placed for removal of timber and care for conservation has not been used when dollar returns were sought, there remains woodland of a type that can be highly utilized recreationally at the present time, and protected for benefit of the future.

Tracts under option run from recently cut-over land to land with extremely fine and valuable large white oak cover. In between and generously spread are wonderful specimens of red oak, black oak, chestnut oak, beech, walnut, hickory, tulip, sycamore, black gum, white and black ash, birch, ironwood, and maple. Thick groves of pine are found here and there. Cedars,

hemlocks, and holly are always nearby. Persimmon is occasional and dogwood is prevalent. Fine large healthy laurel abounds all over the hillsides. About a dozen types of moss cover rocks and fallen trees. Ferns are frequent. Poison ivy is extremely rare.

FAUNA

Fauna of consequence but not in great numbers are: squirrel, rabbit, red and gray fox, quail, turtle-dove, wild turkey, black mink, pheasant and weasel. Fewer, are woodchucks, chipmunks, raccoons and possum. Both of the creeks are reported to have supported fine fish life in the past, and it is certain conditions can be corrected to encourage fish life here in the future.

HISTORY

History of old Prince William County shows that the problem area never has enjoyed sustained prosperity; probably its lands never have been qualified to promote lasting, good, rural economic and social order through farm enterprise.

The Indians fished and farmed hereabouts on a small scale. Delay in early white settlement can be attributed particularly to fear of the Dogues, a tribe of unscrupulous makeup. Captain John Smith is credited with having traded in the area first in 1608 and Giles Brent, who came to Maryland under the grant to Lord Baltimore, was the first white man to live in it. In 1685, three English partners attempted to colonize 30,000 acres of land around what is known as Brenton. In 1714 a small group of Germans established near the Rapidan, mined iron ore and began a small iron industry. Later, in 1719 they moved to a point in Stafford County but none of these settlements lived long.

From 1663 to 1740 land grants were followed by frequent land trades among a small number of large tract owners. This period saw land being cleared and plantations taking form all along the rivers and creeks that emptied into the Potomac. Tobacco was a medium of exchange from about 1650 to about 1776 and, around the later date, old Prince William County had become divided into plantations owned by wealthy tobacco planters. Sailing vessels with bricks, furniture, silver, wines and fine cloth would visit its shores; their masters and plantation owners would negotiate directly and their crews would make deliveries of cargoes at plantation sites.

Efforts were made by the General Assembly of Virginia to regulate trade through establishment of stores and towns but plantation owners, through direct trading, defiantly kept down the growth of all towns. In 1713 Scotch merchants built tobacco storehouses on Quantico Creek but not until 1749 was established the town which became Dumfries. It was wonderfully laid out on terraced hills overlooking the beautiful creek (then river). It soon prospered; roads converged there and great ships called at docks located close to the present highway. A custom house, shops, a theatres, taverns, a race course, a courthouse, a newspaper, a high school, a private academy and fine homes made Dumfries the business and social center of northern Virginia. Its importance was realized by the head of a family in England who desired to learn of comparative business opportunities in the growing colonies for a son who was just finishing school, and was

about to be placed for a career in commerce. Friends, among successful merchants in American, were written to recommend between Dumfries and New York. Today, Dumfries and all its work could be housed in New York's Hippodrome.

Occoquan, Quantico and Colchester also became important towns of the period but all went to waste after the outbreak of the Revolutionary War when agricultural production became poorer in the section and ship-trade ceased, never to be resumed.

Many important persons visited or lived in this section in the early days. The full story of important early American life on lands embraced in and close to the project area awaits composition. Complete rebuilding of Dumfries and the interesting surrounding countryside, thus, would seem to be fair enough reward for continuance of research.

After the War Between the States plantations were impoverished and today ruins of mills, almost obliterated sign of property ownership, stone piles and head-stones in many small burial plots attest [to] population and use of the land for the period running from Colonial to Confederate War days. Since the defeat of the Confederacy, there have been both abandonment and attack on the problem of obtaining livelihood, shown by sporadic, recurring attempts of individuals.

Spoil banks, shafts, stray bits of mine equipment and habitations of hangers-on...surface westerly of Dumfries, where remains a part of a stranded rural industrial group, engaged for about a third of a century, up to 1919, in mining pyrites and conveying it by narrow gauge railroad to scows on the Potomac.

Seemingly living conditions have been good in the problem area only in two epochs; around 1750 when business activity centered in tobacco cultivation and shipment and a century later when there was a spread of plantation and woodland ownerships, stores and mills.

SOILS

Geologically the project area runs with Piedmont and Coastal Plain formations carrying Wissahickon Schist, Granite, Patuxent Arkose and Sand, Patapsco Clay, Quantico Slate, Green Stone Volcanics and Peters Creek Quartzite. Practically the entire surface carries upland sand and gravel.

The agricultural soils have good depth, good drainage and lie fairly well. Both surface and sub-soils run light to medium. The surface soil consists of around two to six inches of clay-loam, containing only a fair proportion of organic matter and is underlain by a reddish brown clay-loam or heavy silt-loam. It is developed under a forest cover of deciduous trees and inclines toward an acid condition throughout. Upland sand and gravel give it a fairly friable consistency. Sub-soils run to a smooth red or yellow clay, disintegrated schists, white sand and gravel, or shaley rock.

The chemical characteristics, in general, are very unfavorable. The percentage of all plant food elements, including phosphoric acid is low. Successful farming depends on the maintenance of

soil fertility and this objective is difficult of accomplishment here. Most of the crop lands can be considered overworked.

Because of the lightness of the soil and sub-soil there is a tendency for available plant food elements to leach down beyond the reach of ordinary cultivated crops. Commercial fertilizers, when added, do not have the cumulative effect from year to year, but disappear after about a year's time.

Granite rock out-croppings are prevalent along creeks and here and there throughout the area. Schist, greenstone volcanics and quartzite show to surface or close to surface after erosion. Cleared lands have not suffered unduly from erosion because they have been located in the flatter areas and practical farm control promptly has arrested its spread. Erosion is to be noted chiefly in the lesser used roadways, which, to an extent, have been destroyed therefrom.

In early days, agriculture consisted in growing subsistence crops and tobacco for export throughout the world. At one time, Dumfries was the largest tobacco market in the world. However, the soil was easily exhausted and soon a poor quality of the weed was produced and became totally undesirable commercially. This situation was reached just prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War when it was becoming more difficult for the inhabitants to sustain themselves upon the soil of the area. The "War Between the States" was the final chapter in the declining prestige of this section from an agricultural standpoint and since then agriculture has been an inadequate source of livelihood.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Today, farms in the problem area are not utilized profitably. Products are corn, wheat, potatoes, green vegetables, oats and hay, and they find extremely small dollar sale. Although Manassas, the County Seat, is supported principally by the dairying industry, there are no dairy farms in the problem area.

About 150 families live in the project area. The heads of about forty of them had steady employment or regular income; seventy had part time employment and forty had irregular, inconsequential or no employment and cash income during the last few years.

It has been observed generally that family hardships and sufferings are not made public, that the heads of most of the families, of early American decent, bear their wants and privations through to exhaustion. It is difficult to understand how living requirements were met by those of little or no income, but the following seems sounds explanation: On one side there are family assets; a farm, with little or no serviceable equipment, poor soil, cut-over woods area, perhaps a horse of old age, a hog or two, rarely a cow or an automobile. On the other side are requirements for food, shelter, clothing, education, and recreation. Inter-farm employment has ceased on competitively-unproductive soils; exhaustion of timber resources has curtailed part-time sawmill employment; opportunity to labor by day on state roads or for private enterprise at Manassas or Quantico is not offered as in former years.

Public relief generally is not called on. The farm is worked and produced practical sustenance of life, without any extras and perhaps without all that is necessary; the dwelling depreciates except for application of labor without material; taxes become delinquent; clothing is obtained through credit at country stores or by inter-family borrowing (credits necessarily have become limited); medical attention for serious illness comes through dispatch of help by neighbors; school books are passed along by older children of other families or furnished by the county. There are no facilities for adult recreation and children play in their simple unguided way.

Mrs. Marion Lewis, Relief Director of Prince William County has stated "As Relief Director of Prince William County, I have visited many homes in the proposed area and I feel that the need for improvement of general conditions is most essential."

The ration of tax delinquency to total levies in Coles and Dumfries Magisterial Districts, Prince William County, was 22% in 1933 and averaged 22% for 1929 through 1933.

A former prosperous blacksmith shop at Joplin did very little shoeing in 1934 even though horses are preferred to tractors thereabouts.

Three former storekeepers, now deceased, acquired many tracts of land, in connection with settlement of accounts held against owners of small farms.

Five storekeepers have given up their business in the area since 1925.

Thirty or more farms have been completely abandoned in the last fifteen years.

REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT

More than one hundred families have been living in the area where the Chopawamsic project is being developed. Many of these people have been on relief, and others have suffered extreme poverty because of the general economic decline of the area. One purpose of the project is to help these families attain a position of being able to care for themselves under better circumstances. Here again the National Park Service and Resettlement Administration are cooperating.

Several of these families are being helped by the Resettlement Administration to move to productive farmland in the vicinity. Farms of proven value are now being selected. When they have been purchased and put in to satisfactory condition, they will be made available to the individual families on a long term payment basis.

Other families are best helped in their present homes through the increase in employment which the establishment of the recreation area has produced, and through a more careful use of their land for part-time farming activities. Rehabilitation loans, accompanied by expert agricultural guidance, are being made available for these families.

There are three camp sections at Chopawamsic: One for mothers and tots, one for girls and one for boys. They are about one mile apart and served by separate water and sewage systems. Each section will consist of one or more camps with accommodations for about 100 persons in each. From three to five units, with facilities such as listed above, will make up each camp. They will operate at maximum through summer and on weekends throughout the rest of the year.

Built of timber cut from the area, the camp buildings are of hardy construction. Stone quarried from an old pyrites mine on the reservation and concrete are used for the foundations. Creosote is applied to the logs to give them finish and preserve the wood in naturalistic appearance. All cabins will be screened and provided with weather proof shutters.

For building operations two sawmills have been kept busy. Stone quarried from the pyrites mine is also used for roadbeds. Though it is not planned to build highways for automobile sightseeing parties, roads will be serviceable for those using the area under sponsorship of the community agencies.

Recreation at Chopawamsic will be supervised to some degree, but will be as individual as possible. Although play fields will be provided, there will be no organized activities except baseball or football as carried out on city playgrounds. Miles of hiking trails are being laid out, and later there will be swimming facilities.

Water recreation will be provided at artificial lakes. The first lake planned will be adjacent to the girls' campground, where a masonry dam will impound the waters of a stream. The dam will have a length of 165 feet and a spillway nearly 30 feet high. A similar lake will be built later at the boys' camp.

Campers at Chopawamsic will find much to engage their attention. Children will be taught to appreciate woodcraft and will be introduced to basketry, woodcarving, botany, geology and the study of birds. Young mothers will be able to study the proper care and feeding of children, receiving their instruction from a dietician and pediatrician [pediatrician]. The personnel of a permanent staff has already been chosen.

Roads, except for service to units and for fire protection, are to be restricted. Unlimited hiking trails with beautiful rest spots and a sufficiency of riding trails will be provided. The area south of the Joplin road is planned for a well-protected wildlife sanctuary, available by trails to all campers. The ruins of an old mill, with a 180-foot overshot water wheel and an outstanding example of an old crib dam stand not far from the highway at Dumfries. The mill, a beautiful stream section of rapids and falls, and a waste area around an abandoned pyrites mine are planned for restoration and cleanup in the development of large, interesting "wayside," along with a large play area for the public on tour or day's outing.

All proposed development is practical and economically considered. Housing with water and sanitary facilities does not encounter unusual construction difficulty. Building materials of good quality: sand, gravel, rock and lumber are native and at hand without extra purchase cost. Proposed lakes can be created quickly by construction of short and low dams. Some reforestation as a protection against erosion is contemplated and two or three areas of the most

fertile land are set up for cultivation of vegetables to be used in the camps. Forest fire protection will be effected. Simple, dignified landscape treatment is to be given spots which need it.

Climate in the area is classed as temperate. It will not differ materially from that of Washington except that it is cooler in the summer. Fall and winter parties will be encouraged. These will include straw rides, barn dances, square dances, etc., in revival of general, wholesome, country fun.

Obviously the area is directed at organized camping for groups sponsored by the welfare agencies, but around its wooded rim will be simple provisions – such a sparking areas, fireplaces, picnic tables and benches, shelters and sanitary facilities-for the use of picnicking parties “on their own.”