

A. Enabling Acts

Act 217, P. A. 1931, known as the Municipal or Community Forest Act, authorizes counties, townships, cities, villages and school districts to establish and maintain forests; provides for commissions to supervise such work; provides for the sale of State lands for such purposes; and places a limitation on the expense of such work.

B. Policy

The Department of Natural Resources is authorized to convey tax reverted land to schools and municipalities for forest purposes. The amount of State land considered for such deedings is limited to the area needed for educational purposes. Forty acres is generally considered sufficient for a school forest, and it should be suitable for the intended purpose and within a reasonable distance from the School for maximum use.

C. Explanation

Since the passage of the Municipal Forest Act, the Department has deeded about 65,000 acres to school districts and municipalities for the establishment of public forests. The primary objectives in establishing local public forests are for demonstration and other educational purposes. Since only the necessary land is deeded, in some instances less than 40 acres is sufficient. In most cases, some tree planting is necessary for the establishment of desirable forest conditions. In such instances, a planting program spread over period of years provides better educational opportunities and also a more desirable distribution of age classes.

When the Municipal Forest Act was passed in 1931, the State had large acreages of undedicated land lying outside of State forests. Much of the land now in school and community forests was originally such land which was conveyed under this act at that time. The largest block, consisting of about 25,000 acres, was conveyed to Gogebic county in several segments over a period of years. There are a few additional early instances where the State deeded rather sizeable acreages to counties and schools during the time when there were relatively large amounts of widely scattered, undedicated State lands available. However, legislative precedent and the Natural Resources Commission policy strongly imply that administration of tax reverted state lands for forestry and multiple use purposes shall be at the state level. More recently such large conveyances have not been made and are not contemplated in the future.

The Division furnishes native seedlings free of charge in limited amounts for planting on school forests where the title to the land

is actually held by the school. Five thousand seedlings is the maximum number a school can receive free per year. The maximum amount obtainable may be less, depending upon the availability of stock. Communities, and schools operating forests not school owned, must purchase such stock.

Many schools located in the forest areas of the State prefer not to own or manage a school forest. Instead, they conduct classes on State forest lands in the vicinity observing tree planting and other forest management practices. In some instances, the students actually plant State forest lands under supervision of the Area.

It is not the responsibility of the DNR to manage school or community forests. The slogan "learn by doing" is quite applicable and our direct assumption of the management role can greatly decrease the educational value of the school forest program. We have certain obligations under our general authority and under the community forest act. However, our objective should be to stimulate optimism, local interest and participation in the management of the area.

Land acquired from the DNR under Act 217, P. A. 1931, can be used only for school, community, or municipal forest purposes. Issuance of a road or other type of easement is considered nonconforming use. Therefore, approval must be received from the DNR before an easement can be issued.

If other use of school forest land is desired, the property must be quit-claimed back to the DNR and then the DNR could reconvey it to the local unit of government under Public Use Deed Act 223, P. A. 1909, if intended use conforms to local needs and is surplus to DNR needs.

D. Procedure

All applications for school and community forest land should be submitted by letter to the Lands Division by the authorized representative of the municipality or school, accompanied by a resolution from the governing body requesting conveyance of the lands. The Lands Division receives, records and forwards the application to the Forest Management Division for field examination and recommendation.

If approval is recommended by the Department, the application goes to the Natural Resources Commission for final action. If the Commission approves, the deed may be issued for the consideration of one dollar.

A record of school and municipal forests is maintained by the Division.

Approved Robert J. Compeau
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