

DEFINITION

"Conservation has many facets. It is a concept rather than a definition. As such it has accumulated to itself a breadth of meaning which has many ramifications. In its strictly etymological sense it means the protection and care of anything, but in common usage it embraces an expanding group of sciences which cover the whole gamut of our natural resources. To the man in the street conservation today means the protection and care of all the renewable natural resources of the state for all the people for all time. These resources may be considered under five headings, namely land, forest, water, wildlife and recreation, and each has many subdivisions. These subdivisions, although often treated separately, are definitely related and the study of one always leads the investigator into the territory of another, and sometimes all five, and although for the sake of clarity it is necessary to discuss each one separately, they together form an integral whole."

INTRODUCTION

Conservation has long been a subject of concern to the people of Ontario. This concern had to do originally with the protection of forests because of their importance as a source of revenue; but allied with this were the problems of wildlife management and the protection of source areas of rivers and streams. In Southern Ontario interest in conservation was indicated first by reforestation and woodlot management, but more recently this has broadened out to include flood control and water conservation, improved land use and recreation areas.

While the progress in these activities has been steady up to the present, most of the programs heretofore were initiated by government departments. Recently, however, there has been a growing conception of personal obligation, especially where land use problems, farm ponds and small reforestation projects are concerned. On the other hand, control of flooding and increased summer flow and large reforestation projects have come to be considered the responsibility of the community—the community, in this case, being the river valley.

With the advent of this new concept of personal and community responsibility in conservation, the Authorities movement was born, and the willingness of our people to undertake conservation in this way is indicated by the rapid progress made in establishing Authorities in the last fourteen years.

The Conservation Branch of the Ontario Department of Commerce and Development was established in 1944 and was charged with organizing conservation work in Southern Ontario on the basis of drainage basins, with all the municipalities continued therein as equal partners.

From the terms of the Act which established this department and the scope of work envisaged for the Conservation Branch, as embodied in The Conservation Authorities Act, it is evident that the field of conservation assigned to it is confined very definitely to working with the municipalities after they decide to carry out a conservation program within their watersheds. The Branch is therefore primarily a planning and co-ordinating arm of the Ontario Government. This must be made very clear, because there are four other departments of this government engaged in conservation activities which deal with specific phases of our natural resources.

The large forest empire in Northern Ontario, with its problems of timber management, fire protection, reforestation, forest research, fish and wildlife, recreation and allied problems, is administered by the Department of Lands and Forests. Matters dealing with soil management and drainage, farm planning, crop improvement and a multitude of other problems which are the concern of the farmers of this province are administered by the Department of Agriculture. The building of dams in the hinterland of the north to maintain lake levels and regulate summer flow is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works.