

The Development and Philosophy  
of the  
Indiana State Park System

by

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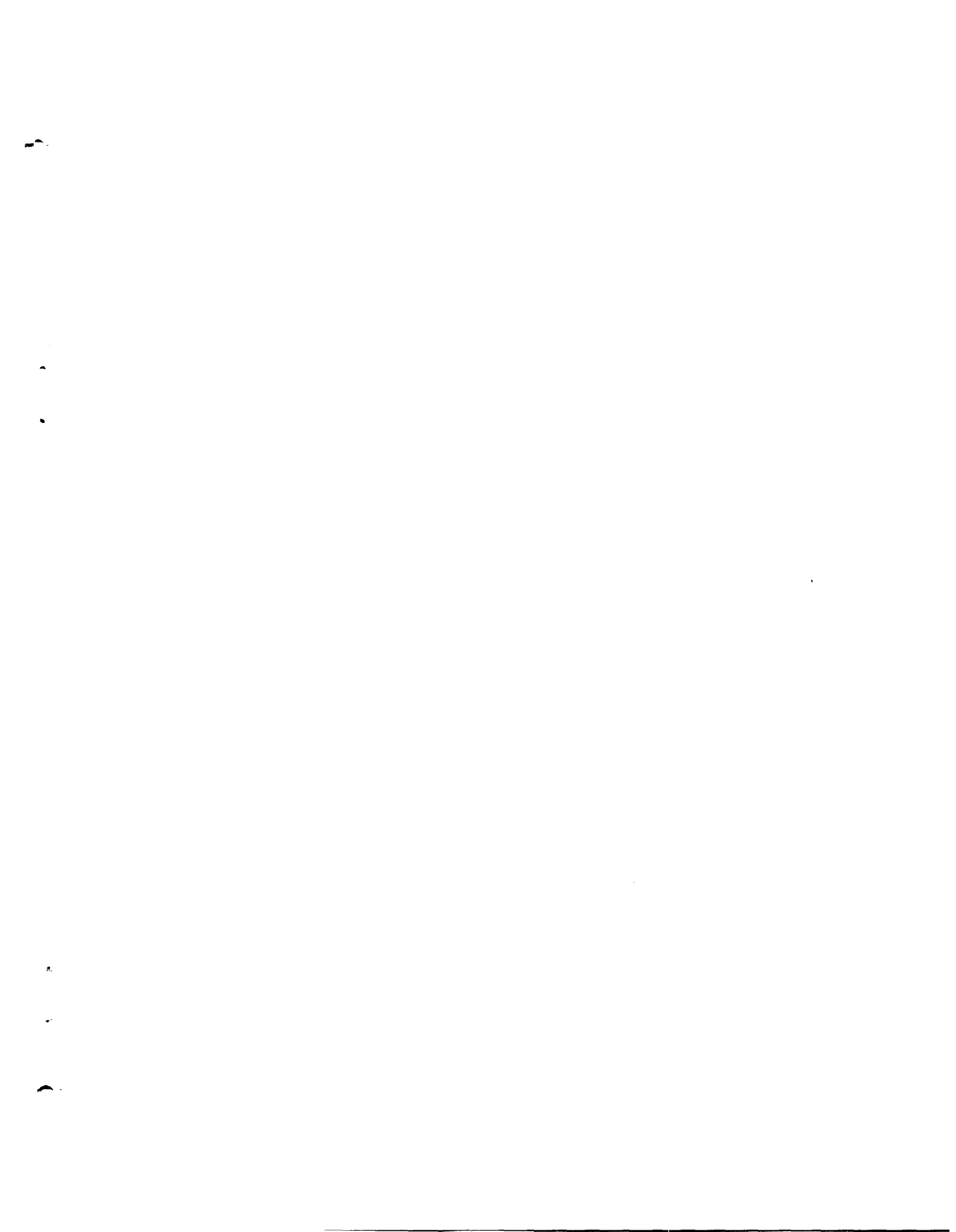
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## Introduction

The state park system of Indiana has developed in a unique manner. While Indiana was not the first state to establish a park system (one third of the states preceded Indiana with some sort of system<sup>1</sup>), Indiana was the first to charge an admission fee when her first parks were established in 1916. The simple logic behind the startling innovation was that the user should pay for the park, rather than the taxpayers as a whole. It has been a remarkably successful policy, though in recent years some shortcomings have become apparent. The biggest plus factor is that the admission fee provides revenue for park operation even when state legislatures become unwilling or unable to provide funds. Thus, Indiana parks operated almost normally during the depression of the thirties, since the admission fee was quite low. For the same reason, Indiana parks have remained open while neighboring states have been forced to temporarily close parks recently, due to lack of operating funds.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, the greatest single influence upon the Indiana park system was Colonel Richard Lieber. It was Colonel Lieber, the chairman of the Indiana State Park Committee in 1915, and long-time head of the Department of Conservation, who made his ideas the prevailing philosophy of the park system<sup>3</sup>. To a great extent, this is true even today.

An example of this Lieber philosophy that exists today is the idea that the primary goal of a state park is preservation of scenic or historic beauty.<sup>4</sup> Recreation was--and is--a secondary purpose, at least in state parks. Where the two goals are in conflict, the preservation takes precedence. Today, of course, there are specific state recreation areas run by another division of the Department of Natural Resources. While functions of the various divisions do overlap, they are apparently well-coordinated within the department.

Parks were originally envisioned as a monument in honor of Indiana's statehood centennial in 1916.<sup>5</sup> It was Lieber that headed the original committee working for this goal, but Governor Samuel Ralston happily issued a grandiose proclamation:

Whereas, the Indiana historical commission, an organization duly authorized by the legislature to devise ways of celebrating the centennial of Indiana statehood, has advanced the plan of providing state parks as the permanent form of the centennial memorial; and

Whereas, the said commission, through its state park memorial committee, proposes to create a fund by means of public subscriptions the purpose of which fund is to acquire scenic tracts and historic spots in various parts of Indiana, and thus lay the foundation for a state-wide park system, and dedicate them to perpetual use of all the people as state parks:

Now, Therefore, I, Samuel M. Ralston, Governor of Indiana, believing in the great civic values that in the present and succeeding generations will come to the people of Indiana through the proposed system of state parks, do urge upon our people to give of their means to this public park fund, and I do hereby designate as an appropriate time for the giving of subscriptions to this cause the week beginning Monday, April 24, 1916.

Through their giving the people will not only show their civic patriotism in most substantial and lasting form in this centennial year, but will secure the creation of this splendid state park heirloom, which

may be handed down to oncoming generations as evidence of our appreciation of what the Hoosier pioneers wrought for our people of the present day; and in Indiana centennial years that are to come will give evidence of our forethought by our foreaction on the one-hundredth birthday of our state.<sup>6</sup>

Ralston's proclamation does point out that even the land for the parks was not to be purchased from state tax revenues, but by voluntary contributions of citizens.

The governor's eloquence notwithstanding, there were a few Hoosiers who saw other advantages to parks besides merely "civic patriotism":

Owen county folk, and particularly Spencer business men, will do well to get busy on the proposition of locating a state park at McCormick's Creek. This famous gorge is being considered, along with other spots, and it is to the interest of Spencer to see that McCormick's is chosen. It is by far the wildest and most primitive spot in Owen county, and likely in the state; it has the added feature of containing the old statehouse quarry; it is easily accessible; it pictures nature unspoiled by "improvements". And, what is more important, to Spencer, its selection will mean money to Spencer. These state parks will be over-run by sightseers and they will spend money--here--if we can locate a state park at the famous McCormick's Creek gorge.<sup>7</sup>

Whether "civic patriotism" or merely economic boon, the Indiana state park system has developed from two early efforts to a large system of parks covering the state. The remaining portion of this paper will discuss the continuing development of the state parks to the present time. Later remarks will also analyze the probable future of the park system--its strengths and weaknesses.

## I. Origins and Early Development

The original park in the Indiana system was to have been Turkey Run. The state had managed to get about \$20,000. Since the property was being sold at auction, the state was prepared to bid this amount. Though fairly small in acreage, Turkey Run had valuable stands of virgin timber which had miraculously survived. Public support was behind the state, and timber companies had apparently agreed to make only token bids. Just as it appeared that the state had gotten the property, the Hoosier Veneer Company made a final bid of \$30,200, and took the tract.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, the state was able to obtain Turkey Run a few months later, still in its primeval condition, but the honor of being the first Indiana state park went to McCormick's Creek.

McCormick's Creek ran through a beautiful wild canyon in Owen County, so it fit Lieber's requirement for scenic value. There was some historic value, too. The canyon contained an old stone quarry which furnished building stone for the state capital building. Like Turkey Run, the tract was to be sold at auction, and the State Park Commission made plans to bid on the tract in early May of 1916. The bid was not to exceed the appraised value of \$5,250; local citizens were asked to contribute \$1,000 of this amount. Local support was



enthusiastic, and \$300 was pledged the same day the request was announced.<sup>9</sup> The rest of the funds were easily obtained, and the state purchased McCormick's Creek on May 31, 1916 for its full appraised value.<sup>10</sup> The original tract was small, less than four hundred acres, and has been increased to several times that size today. The wisdom of the commission, though, in selecting this site was anything but small. Even today it remains one of the most popular parks in the Indiana system. It takes only a quick visit to this beautiful park to see why.

With typical Hoosier aplomb, McCormick's Creek was officially dedicated with a Fourth of July Sunday School picnic!<sup>11</sup> A large crowd was on hand for the momentous occasion.

Meanwhile, the commission was still trying to get Turkey Run--this time offering to buy it from the Hoosier Veneer Company. Original offers of the company included one condition--the tract would be sold after the virgin timber had been cut! Turkey Run had been a popular recreation area since the 1880's, when it was established as a privately run summer resort, and its main attraction was the magnificent timber!<sup>12</sup> The commission was adamant that the timber be left alone, and eventually they got their way, purchasing Turkey Run in November, 1916 for \$40,200.<sup>13</sup> Already an attractive and popular area, Turkey Run boasted 25,000 visitors by 1918.<sup>14</sup>

As parks became established, a fairly regular routine also became established. The admission fee was ten cents

for many years, but the policy was not to charge any admission for the first year or so that a park was in operation. This allowed people to become familiar with the park. Then when it had been improved and developed (utilizing funds from profits of other parks), the admission fee could be fairly charged to the established clientele.

By 1923, two other parks--Clifty Falls and Muscatatuck--had been established, making a total park acreage of 1500 acres.<sup>15</sup> Muscatatuck, originally named Vinegar Mills, was one of the strange exceptions that always seemed out-of-place. In the first place, it was only eighty five acres, and, while attractive, was not particularly scenic or historic. Several sources have since suggested that since it was a gift of Jennings County, the commission could not easily turn it down. Since it was not really suited as a park, some years ago Muscatatuck was transferred<sup>to</sup> other usage, and is now maintained as part of a larger wildlife area.

Another park from the early period--Mounds, donated by Madison County<sup>16</sup>--also does not fit the criteria for a park, though it has been maintained as one since its inception in 1929. Mounds is well under three hundred acres, with no room for expansion, far too small even by recommended standards when it was established. It does, however, have historic significance in its Indian earthworks. Simply for administrative consistency, if nothing else, it has been recommended that Mounds Park be reclassified as a state memorial or historic park<sup>17</sup>

These were not the only parks established in the early period. By 1930, the Department of Conservation (which had followed the commission in 1919) had several state memorials, a state forest, and the following additional parks, established in the standard way which had evolved: Pokagon, Indiana Dunes, and Spring Mill, with its fascinating restored pioneer village.<sup>18</sup> Dunes had become an instant success--its proximity to a dense population had assured that, and Pokagon was in Indiana's ever-popular northern lake area.

Thus, by 1930, just fourteen short years from its beginning, the Indiana park system had become a great success; the basic pattern was well-established, and the future merely built upon it. Indiana had been fortunate in having two great assets in this early period--first, a dynamic leader, Colonel Lieber, and secondly, enthusiastic public support. Without this combination, it is doubtful that much would have been accomplished.

## II. The Middle Years

The park system continued to grow and improve throughout the 1930's and 1940's. Existing parks were developed; additional parks were established. By 1935 the parks were drawing over one million visitors per year--about forty-two per cent out-of-state. Even discounting children (they were admitted free), considerable revenue was being generated. This was used for better camping facilities, recreation areas, inns, etc.<sup>19</sup> State parks were perfect family outing places during the depression years; on the whole, they were inexpensive and convenient. With gate fees pouring back into park development, parks were better and better, and people came to the parks in ever-increasing numbers. This cyclical effect was coupled to federal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, and thus the effect was multiplied even more:

When the depression of the 1930's struck, Indiana was really making plans to use federal government aid in developing inns, exhibits, naturalist services, picnic and camping grounds, and hiking trails, with the result that Indiana emerged from the depression with some of the finest state park facilities in the nation.<sup>20</sup>

The role of the CCC in the middle years was vitally important. It seems likely that the Indiana park system would have done well in the depression without the CCC, but with it, Indiana parks were superlative, especially

in comparison to parks of other states. The scope of CCC work is seen by looking at several major Indiana parks. After less than two years of work, the CCC had accomplished much: At McCormick's Creek, five miles of roads were built, trails improved, new shelter houses built, water system improved, and a new entrance was built. More than half a million trees were planted at Shakamak, and fifty miles of roads were cleared at Brown County.<sup>21</sup> Considering that these projects were in progress at every Indiana park, the total impact was tremendous. Based on past performance, it appears that the CCC would certainly be worth reviving, at least within the context of state parks!

As this paper is primarily concerned with a broad view of the entire system, individual parks may not always be covered. However, a few new parks might well be briefly covered at this point. Brown County, mentioned above, was established in 1930, through purchase of land, combined with gifts of land. A large adjoining game preserve area was officially transferred to the park in 1941, making a very large area--by far the largest Indiana park. It is, of course, justifiably famous for its beautiful scenery. Lincoln Park was also established in this time period--1932, to be exact. It was extensively developed, the primary emphasis having been historic rather than scenic. The most interesting park in the early years of the middle period, however, was Shakamak. Shakamak was the first park which really had little to offer in either scenic or historic

value. It was very much a recreational development--which was, indeed, a valid reason.<sup>22</sup> It was, however, counter to the prevailing philosophy up to that time. Were the same type of project to be undertaken today, it would probably fall to the strictly recreational area classification, rather than the park classification. To emphasize the point: the establishment of Shakamak was a desirable and commendable project; by today's standards, however, it would be more consistly called a recreation area, rather than a state park. The real significance is in the fact that the Department of Conservation had evolved to a broader position--one which recognized the necessity and validity of human recreation, per se.

Another somewhat unique development occurred in 1943, with the establishment of Versailles and Tippecanoe River State Parks. These two parks were transferred from the National Park Service. They had originally been developed by the National Park Service as recreation demonstration areas, utilizing primarily farm land of submarginal value.<sup>23</sup> Each of these parks, however, does have an inherent scenic value, and it is of note that they were recreationally developed when the state took control--it was not a state project.

The development of Whitewater State Park a few years later is the purest example of strictly recreational development in an Indiana park. There is a fine stand of beech-

maple forest, but little else existed. An artificial lake was created, and recreation was developed around the lake. It was perhaps this sort of situation that Richard Lieber had in mind in 1939, when he commented:

Today there is an ill-starred tendency to scramble all recreational eggs and call the result a state park. State parks are meant to be the show windows of a state but more than that state parks are a dedication to the soul of the land. . . It is the land on which we all depend in the last essence. It is the land and the very soil, the trees and waters, the dales and glens which we love. Without vision a land will die. Without inspiration we remain disconnected from the immortal order of all things.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, it would not be fair to say that Lieber was anti-recreation. Lieber merely had strong ideas about what a park should be. The eventual conclusion is that the controversy over parks and recreation is simply a matter of terminology. Lieber preferred a park to be a certain type of place--a narrow, limited definition. General usage is much broader, but as has been pointed out earlier, classification of units seems important mostly for administrative consistency. The present day Department of Natural Resources has separate divisions for various classifications, but policies are frequently identical, or nearly so. A greater consistency might be more comforting to the pigeon-holing human mind, but is probably not that important in actuality. To be truly fair to the Department of Conservation in the middle years, it must be recognized, also, that Lieber's terminology had been abandoned; a "park" was legitimately considered such for either recreational or scenic/historic purposes.

By 1946 department planners had tentatively made plans as to what should be done in the future. Using "parks" as a dichotomous term--recreation and scenic/historic, areas that needed parks were listed--either as recreation or as preservation of unique areas.<sup>25</sup> Neither aspect has been completed according to the needs seen at that time--and their assessment of needs was quite well done. In general, the scenic/historic needs seem to have been covered reasonably well by some aspect of the Department of Natural Resources. Recreational areas probably haven't fared so well.

As an interesting aside in the middle years, Shades Park was established in 1948. This area, popular as a recreational and scenic spot since Civil War days was purchased from voluntary contributions. The trees at Shades grew so thick and produced such a gloomy effect that the real name was "Shades of Death".<sup>26</sup> As that seems inconsistent with the idea of a pleasant state park, it is fortunate that time has shortened the title to "Shades".

The middle years for Indiana parks were decidedly not deathly! It was in this period that Indiana parks reached their peak. By 1949, the Indiana park system was probably still the finest in the nation, though other states were making great strides. In a little over thirty years Indiana had gone from nothing in parks to the zenith, with a system comprising fifteen parks.<sup>27</sup>



### III. The Decline

By the late 1950's Indiana parks were no longer the nation's zenith. The modern economy had finally bypassed the time when an admissions fee would finance the parks adequately. While some progress was made in these years, the overall picture is one of slow decline. Unfortunately, the same cyclical effect that helped the parks in the early years was also valid in reverse: declining adequacy of revenues brought declining attendance rate increases, which further aggravated the revenue problem.

Before further analysis of the problem, it might be well to mention the few successes of the period. Lieber Park was dedicated in 1958 as a memorial to Richard Lieber and his work.<sup>28</sup> A few other acquisitions were made occasionally, and Kankakee State Park was changed to LaSalle State Fish and Game Area--a wise choice, since Kankakee was apparently a large swamp, valuable, and not without beauty, but hardly well-suited for park use.<sup>29</sup>

By the early 1960's even the casual park visitor could sense that something was wrong. The parks were still beautiful, and still reasonably well-maintained, but there was no progress. Maintenance is well and good, but after a point it becomes mere preservation of outmoded facilities.

The director of the Department of Conservation made some perceptive observations in 1963, addressing himself to the problem:

In other words, the last two years have seen the State Parks operating on revenues alone as well as providing funds for what capital improvements, primarily in family camping, that could be provided. This cannot be done forever. We are simply living off our depreciation of existing improvements. We currently lead all states in the revenue from fees in our state park system and are 49th in percentage of total operation cost from general fund support. The plain fact is that we have run our limit. Without additional support, the Department has reached the decision to close some state parks rather than to continue to exploit some of our existing popular state parks to the point of ruin by supporting some of the less-attended parks by short changing the better-attended parks.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, the stage of closing parks was never reached, but it came close. Ironically, as Indiana parks faltered, other states continued to make progress. If all parks and memorials had been self-supporting, the situation would not have been as severe, but less popular areas (which is not to say less important or valuable) continually operated at a loss, and the profits of the successes had to make up the difference.

Not only were existing facilities faltering, it was impossible for needed expansion and acquisition to take place:

Indiana is increasing its holdings of outdoor recreation acreage at a snail's pace. While other states are spending millions of dollars annually for the expansion and operation of their state park systems, we have great difficulty securing \$200,000 a year for capital improvements. The revenues from our state parks must not only pay the complete cost of their operation; they must, in addition, pay for<sup>31</sup> almost all the cost of operating our state memorials.

The actual extent of the situation is perhaps best seen in a 1962 report which stated that for the years 1963-1965, \$7,202,810 was needed. This amount was "considered essential to the development and improvement of the State Parks, State Recreation Areas, State Memorials, and State Park Inns, in order that facilities and services can be provided to meet the needs of the visiting public."<sup>32</sup> Part of this figure could, of course, come from gate fees, but only a small part.

Thus, Indiana's park system was in trouble. As it faced the modern world and the future, however, it should be noted that revenues were adequate for maintenance and operation; they did not provide funds for capital improvements.<sup>33</sup>

#### IV. The Present and the Future

Indiana parks have made some gains in the last few years; these gains are probably inadequate. Park officials now see Indiana as fifth or sixth in the nation (behind such states as California, New York, Michigan, Florida, and Kentucky).<sup>34</sup> This is reassuring in that most of the states ahead of Indiana are large, populous states, and thus would need finer park systems. On the other hand, if Indiana's parks are rated that highly, what are the parks like in other states? Nationwide, we are apparently a nation of inadequate and outdated recreational facilities. Fortunately, private enterprise has closed some of the gap between needs and reality.

In all fairness it must be pointed out that little, if any, of the blame can be placed on park officials. They have done what was possible with available funds, made plans for development if funds became available, and lobbied for funds. Development was planned under a ten-year program (1965-1975) that would affect all state parks, memorials, recreation areas, etc. In short, the plan involves all properties managed by the Department of Natural Resources (which replaced the Department of Conservation).<sup>35</sup> The plan would update each state park in three phases, each to cost

approximately one-and-a-half million dollars.<sup>36</sup> The extensive work done at McCordick's Creek in recent years is a fine example of the plan's excellence, especially since only the first phase was completed.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, present rates of appropriations for this development have been about \$3 million per year.<sup>38</sup> Using twenty parks as a rough figure (it depends on how state beaches and recreation areas are counted), at that rate of appropriation it will take thirty years to complete the ten-year program! By that time, the first and second phases may very well be obsolete. Moreover, this leaves no funds to increase actual land areas. Indiana is twenty-second among the states in terms of actual acreage per thousand population that is available for recreation. In terms of annual visits per acre, Indiana is even worse--thirty-second of the states!<sup>39</sup> It should be obvious that there are limits to the numbers that can use a given facility. For this reason, the ten-year program recommended acquiring new areas, such as an unspoiled lake in northern Indiana, an area east of Indianapolis, a natural prairie area of northwest Indiana, and others. These areas have been recommended for acquisition for some years--well before the ten-year plan.

What is to be the future? The Department of Natural Resources has done its part for the people of Indiana--the plans are ready, and the parks are fortunately able to operate on the slim park revenues. It seems that the future of Indiana parks depends upon the state legislature. Greater funding is an absolute necessity for proper development and

growth. Previous appropriated funds have been derived mainly from cigarette taxes.<sup>40</sup> This will not be adequate. Indiana need not be concerned with being the best in the nation in parks simply for prestige; far more importantly, Indiana must be concerned with the welfare of her citizens. A superlative state park and recreation system would mean much in attaining that goal. Some may wonder about retaining the admission fee, if adequate funds were appropriated. Firstly, adequate funds are not likely to be appropriated--at least not to the extent of replacing admissions revenues and providing for improvements. Secondly, as the state park officials point out, the admission fee provides a base for minimum operations, so that parks are not totally dependent on the whim of the legislature. After all, the admission fee is reasonable. Any one who can afford to get to the parks, can probably afford the fee; it is not likely that the fee, per se reduces park usage to any great extent. Finally, perhaps there is something to the idea that the user has more respect for the property if he pays for the privilege (admittedly, this is a weak point).

Perhaps the ultimate responsibility for Indiana's state parks rests on the individual citizen. What will we, as citizens, require of our legislators? Indiana's parks can meet the future adequately. Her citizens will determine whether or not they do.

APPENDIX

Present Indiana State Parks<sup>41</sup>

<u>PARK</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>	<u>FOUNDING DATE</u> <sup>42</sup>
Brown County	15,428	1929
Chain O'Lakes	2,678	1960
Clifty Falls	1,200	1920
Indiana Dunes	2,182	1925
Lieber	8,283	1958
Lincoln	1,731	1932
McCormick's Creek	1,753	1916
Mounds	254	1930
Pokagon	1,173	1925
Shades	2,960	1947
Shakamak	1,766	1929
Spring Mill	1,319	1927
Tippecanoe River	2,761	1943
Turkey Run	2,182	1916
Versailles	1,515	1943
Whitewater	1,515	1949

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Beatrice Ward Nelson, State Recreation: Parks, Forests and Game Preserves (Washington, 1928), pp. 302-431.

<sup>2</sup> David S. Griffith, private interview at Indiana Division of State Parks, Indianapolis, Indiana, June 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Indiana History Bulletin, January, 1945, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Griffith, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Indiana History Bulletin, September, 1926, p. 205.

<sup>6</sup> Owen Leader, April 19, 1916, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Leader, May 10, 1916, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Owen Leader, May 24, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Owen Leader, May 31, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Indianapolis News, July 4, 1916, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Allen Frederick, "Richard Lieber, Conservationist and Park Builder: The Indiana Years" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1960), p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Owen Leader, November 15, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Indiana Magazine of History, June 1919, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> Fifth Annual Report (Indianapolis: Indiana Department of Conservation, 1923), pp. 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Indiana History Bulletin, April, 1929, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Griffith, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Tenth Annual Report (Indianapolis: Indiana Department of Conservation, 1929), p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Outdoor Indiana, January, 1936, pp. 10, 22.



<sup>20</sup>Reynold E. Carlson, "Recreation and Parks", in Indiana A Self-Appraisal, ed. by Donald F. Carmony (Bloomington: IU Press, 1966), p. 250.

<sup>21</sup>Outdoor Indiana, March, 1935, pp. 17, 20, 26.

<sup>22</sup>Outdoor Indiana, January, 1941, pp. 15-16, 20.

<sup>23</sup>Outdoor Indiana, May, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Eieber, quoted in Thomas E. Dustin, "Perspective", in Natural Features of Indiana, ed. by Alton A. Lindsey (Indianapolis: Indiana Academy of Science, 1966), p. 587.

<sup>25</sup>Outdoor Indiana, July, 1946, pp. 9-10.

<sup>26</sup>Bill Hougland, "Dollars and Dimes Save The Shades", Outdoor Indiana, July, 1948, pp. 2-3.

<sup>27</sup>Outdoor Indiana, March, 1949, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Owen Leader, June 19, 1958, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas B. March, "Kankakee State Park Becomes LaSalle Stat Fish and Game Area", Outdoor Indiana, March, 1964, pp. 16-19.

<sup>30</sup>Donald E. Foltz, "Just Keeping Store is not Enough," Outdoor Indiana, January, 1963, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup>Garrett G. Eoley, "Recreation Can Improve the State's Economic Status", Outdoor Indiana, February, 1963, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Kenneth R. Cougill, "\$7,000,000 for Recreation", Outdoor Indiana, December, 1962, pp. 18-21.

<sup>33</sup>Griffith, loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Henry C. Prange, "What's Ahead at McCormick's Creek", Outdoor Indiana, April, 1969, pp. 4-9.

<sup>36</sup>Griffith, loc. cit.

<sup>37</sup>Prange, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup>Griffith, loc. cit.

<sup>39</sup>Richard M. Highsmith, Jr., J. Granville Jensen, and Robert Rudd, Conservation in the United States (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1969), p. 236.

<sup>40</sup>Griffith, loc. cit.

<sup>41</sup>Indiana Camping Guide (Indianapolis: Indiana Department of Natural Resources, n.d.).

<sup>42</sup>"Indiana State Parks", duplicated table furnished by Richard H. Caldemeyer, n.d.

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