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INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH
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ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE
MICHIGAN CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

by

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Michigan's Conservation Department was created by legislative act in 1921. This act consolidated previously separate Boards, Bureaus and Surveys under one administrative Commission. Prior to 1921, the Geological Survey, State Land Office, State Parks, Forest Service, Fish and Game Commission, etc. were separate and much overlapping and confusion existed.

The administrative and executive responsibility for conservation affairs is vested in a Conservation Commission of seven men appointed by the governor of the state. The original commission was made up of 3 members appointed for 2 years, 2 for 4 years and 2 for 6 years. Vacancies are filled by the governor with the approval of the senate and these appointments are for a period of 6 years. The result is an overlapping in the terms of office and since a governor is rarely elected for more than four successive years, it would be difficult for him to gain control of the Commission. Such a plan results in the so-called "staggered" Commission which has another decided advantage in that policies tend to be continuous and no radical changes in them are likely. Quoting the act of 1921, "the Commissioners shall be selected with special reference to their training and experience along the line of one or more of the principal lines of activities vested in the department of conservation and their ability and fitness to deal therewith." General representation of the state

interests is insured by a provision that two of the commissioners shall reside in the Upper Peninsula. The commissioners are paid no salaries, but are reimbursed for expenses while traveling in performance of their duties. The commission meets regularly once a month and at other special sessions called by the chairman at the request of a majority of the members.

The commission appoints a Director of Conservation, who is the executive head of the Department and who in turn employs the necessary staff.

In addition to general control of conservation activities, the commission in 1925 was given discretionary powers over fish and game. These include the right to further restrict bag limits or seasons when necessary to protect species which may not be adequately cared for under the laws as set up by the legislature. This power has not been extensively used by the commission and then only in cases of emergency. However, such a discretionary power is highly desirable. For example, an unusually late, cold spring may retard the spawning period of certain species of fish so that the normal opening dates of fishing may be too early to give these fish protection during the breeding season. In such a case, after thorough investigation, the commission may delay the date of opening. An unfavorable nesting season or disease may reduce the population of a valuable game bird to a point where an open season would not be safe for the game or profitable to the hunter. If the Department's game experts so report to the commission, it may declare a closed season on this species.

The Conservation Department consists of the following divisions, each with its head responsible to the Director: Field Administration which is concerned with enforcement of conservation laws, forest fire prevention and protection of game refuges; Fish Division which is responsible for fish propagation and otherwise improving the sport and game fisheries; Game Division concerned with supervision and management of game; Forestry Division which manages 12 state forests, conducts reforestation and forest research; Geological Survey charged with the supervision of gas, oil and mineral resources and with the preparation of maps; Lands Division which administers state lands, and supervises homesteading; Parks Division which controls and maintains 71 state parks; Education Division which has supervision of all con-

ervation education and public relations; and finally, the Land Economic Survey which conducts an inventory of all the natural resources. In addition to these, there are of course, the highly necessary divisions of administrative and general operations.

The revenue for the Conservation Department comes from two sources: the game protection fund, derived from hunting, fishing and trapping licenses approximating \$900,000 annually and which finances in whole or in part the divisions concerned with fish and game; the general tax fund which contributes the remainder of the support of the Department. The following are the approximate percentages of the Game Protection Fund expended by each Division: Administration 2%, Law Enforcement 24%, General Operation 6%, Fish Division 23%, Predatory Animal Control 2.5%, Forest Fire Control 17%, Game Division 8.5%, Land Division 5.5%, Educational Division 5.5%, Fairs and Exhibits .5%, Miscellaneous 1%, and Land Tax 7%.

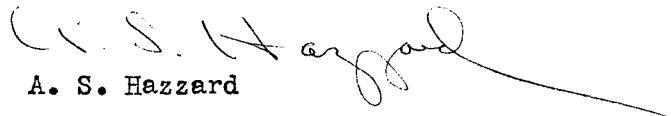
It may be of interest to this group that the commission form of government has resulted in freeing the Conservation Department from political interference. Having recently come from the West where in some states conservation officers commonly spend much time in electioneering for various state officials to whom they are indebted and where their jobs were not safe when politics changed, it was refreshing to observe the freedom of Michigan's Conservation Department. Although we have no state Civil Service as yet, no employee of the Department has ever been forced to leave because of his political faith. No inquiry as to a man's party is made when he is hired nor is any consideration given politics in his promotion.

Since the commission was established, there have been several attempts to inject politics into the Department. A former state governor had rashly promised one of his campaign managers a high post in this organization, but his recommendations were flatly rejected by the commission. The governor then attempted to gain control of this body by a law increasing the membership of the commission from seven to nine. The organized sportsmen of the state saw through this ruse and promptly blocked it.

A further proof of the lack of politics in this organization is found in the fact that the present chairman of the commission is a member of the Democratic party and has held this office throughout three administrations. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that Michigan is dominantly controlled by the Republican party. The staggered form of commission is largely responsible for freeing conservation from politics in Michigan.

INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH

By: A. S. Hazzard

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. S. Hazzard", written over the typed name. The signature is written in dark ink and extends to the right with a long horizontal stroke.