Wisconsin Marks Forest History

Historical markers in Wisconsin both tell the forest history of the state and promote the cause of conservation. Such markers have long been used in Wisconsin to draw public attention to memorable persons or incidents. Official state efforts began in 1953 when the legislature established the Wisconsin Historical Markers Commission, which launched a program under the direction of the State Historical Society. The Conservation Department now cooperates with the Historical Society in the work of establishing historical markers which tell the story of conservation efforts in the state.

As a result of this collaboration, markers have been erected telling of the great Peshtigo forest fire of 1871 and of the Phillips fire of 1894 which destroyed more than 400 homes and claimed 13 lives within a matter of hours. Another has marked the site of the state’s first logging railroad. A notable event, the first flight of Jack Vilas in a flying boat on forest fire patrol in 1915—a flight which Wisconsin foresters claim was the nation’s first forest patrol flight—is the subject of an interesting marker which stands near Trout Lake. The work of forest restoration has been commemorated by a plaque at Big Trout Lake where E. M. Griffith, Wisconsin’s first State Forester, established headquarters for the state program of tree planting and protection of forests from fire in the spring of 1911. “It may well be said,” concludes the inscription, “that the measure of success which has been or will ever be attained in the restoration of the forest resource in this state had its tangible beginnings here.”

The Wisconsin Historical Society has now placed more than 100 official markers in all parts of the state. Increasing emphasis is being placed on markers dealing with renewable resources. Efforts which have begun with plaques relating to the history of forestry are now being expanded to deal with fisheries, game, parks, wild life and waters.

Little River Logging Account Published

There is an interesting article in the 1961 annual publication of the East Tennessee Historical Society entitled “Logging on Little River in 1890-1940.” The article describes logging operations of the Little River Lumber Company during those years before its cutover lands were absorbed into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For a copy of the annual write The Secretary, East Tennessee Historical Society, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee.