

THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IN TUCKER COUNTY WEST VIRGINIA 1933-1942

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The Civilian Conservation Corps was established in 1933, by Senate Bill 598. The Emergency Conservation Work bill was introduced to Congress on March 27, 1933, cleared both the House and Senate and was on President Franklin Roosevelt's desk for signature on March 31, 1933. President Roosevelt signed the bill and the first camp was opened near Luray, Virginia, on April 17. The bill authorized 275,000 enrollees (as the boys were called) to be located in thirteen hundred camps throughout the country.

Robert Fechner was appointed National Director on April 5, 1933, by Executive Order 1601. He immediately established an Advisory Council composed of representatives of the departments of War, Interior, Agriculture and Labor. These four agencies would be responsible for the administration of the Emergency Conservation Work program, which officially had its name changed to the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The Department of Labor was responsible for the recruitment and selection of the young men applying to the Civilian Conservation Corps. The War Department would be responsible for the conditioning and transportation of the enrollees and camp construction. The War Department would also be responsible for the administration of the individual camps because of its past experience in dealing with company size (two hundred men) units. The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture selected the sites for the camps, planned and supervised the work projects with the cooperation of local, state and federal forests and parks.

The country was divided into nine Corps Areas for the administration of the program. These nine areas followed the boundaries of the already established nine army corps areas throughout the United States. West Virginia was part of the Fifth Corps Area, which also included Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. In all of the corps areas, each state was divided into districts and sectors for administrative purposes. Thus, the Civilian Conservation Corps camps in Tucker County were in the Fifth Corps Area, Charleston District, and Elkins Sector. There was a commanding officer at each level from the corps area to the camp level.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was strictly a youth agency for men only. It employed men between the ages of 17 and 25. The age restrictions were expanded during times when there was a shortage of recruits. Once selected for enrollment, the new enrollees went to a conditioning camp for 2 weeks, where they were given physical examinations and became physically fit for the work that was ahead of them. The conditioning camps were at established army post in close proximity to the state where the men were from. Before leaving the camps, the men were formed into units of company strength, two hundred strong, and a cadre that included a commanding officer, junior officer and medical officer. Some military enlisted personnel were assigned to each unit to

help with the new camp construction, provisions and logistical support.

The Civilian Conservation Corps companies would then proceed to their designated location and set up camp. The original camp sites were comprised of surplus army tents until permanent barracks, dining halls, tool sheds, administration buildings and other quarters were constructed.

Each camp received a designation according to the organization that governed the work done at that camp. If the work projects were to be done in a national forest the camp had a prefix letter of "F" and a number designation which showed its location. Each company also received a company number of either three or four numbers. The third number from the right indicated the corps area that the company originated in. Company 518 was located in Parsons, and having work details governed by the United States Forest Service its designation was F-3. Company 1524 was located in Lead Mine and had the designation of F-10. Company 524 was located in Hinton, and the Corps of Engineers was responsible for the work detail clearing the reservoir for Bluestone Dam. Thus, its designation was "C of E-1."

A company that was organized in a specific corps area did not necessarily stay in that corps area. Many companies organized from West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky were sent to locations in the west to do work projects. Six companies from the 5th Corps Area were sent to Yellowstone National Park while others did work in California, Idaho, Nevada and other states. The idea behind moving work crews to geographical locations was two-fold. First, they sent the men to locations where they were needed the most. Some geographic locations were not as populated as others, and major projects needed a larger number of workers to complete the projects. Many enrollees went west to work on irrigation projects for the Bureau of Reclamation, or work on many of the major dam projects such as Boulder Dam at Lake Mead, Nevada. The second idea behind sending men to far away locations was to keep them in camp. Early on in the program, many would get homesick and leave camp to go home or run off and get married. If they had no means of getting home, more were likely to stay in camp.

In the 1930s, the transient society we know today did not exist. Many people of little means did not venture too far from home. It was not unheard of for some not to travel more than 10 miles away from home in a lifetime. Some people had little interaction with people outside their family or local community throughout their whole life.

Many who lived in rural areas would perform tasks at home or on the farm day after day. The economy was bad and jobs were scarce. Many of America's youth quit school to try to find employment to help support their families. Enrollees were paid \$30 per month. They had to agree to send \$25 of that home every month to help those left at home. The other \$5 was theirs to spend as they wanted to. If an enrollee attained the rank of assistant leader or leader, he received an extra monthly allotment which he was allowed to keep.

The period of greatest development in West Virginia's, and the nation's forest resources occurred between the years of 1933 and 1942. The Civilian Conservation Corps had many camps on federal and state properties. During this time many state forests were

acquired and developed and a great deal of work was performed in the national forests. The fire control program progressed rapidly through the construction of fire towers, observation cabins, telephone lines and access roads. This program did more than develop resources; it developed character in a large segment of the youth of this country by assigning them responsibilities and giving them opportunities in the great outdoors.

Many of the Civilian Conservation Corps projects on the Monongahela National Forest involved forest improvement, including timber stand improvement and inventories, surveys and reforestation projects. Some of the most important surveys the work crews helped conduct on the forest were the timber surveys which helped develop plans for the future management of timber resources.

Civilian Conservation Corps Company 519 was located near Davis, West Virginia, and named Camp Dry Fork (F-1). It was established on May 20, 1933, as a temporary tent camp. Ernest Smith was the camp superintendent. Company 519 was moved into permanent winter barracks at Petersburg, West Virginia, on November 18, 1933 and remained there until the fall of 1941. After moving to Petersburg, the camp name changed to Camp North Fork, and was given the designation of F-11.

Civilian Conservation Corps Company 1524 was located at Lead Mine, West Virginia, and called Camp Lead Mine (F-10). The camp was established as a Forest Service camp on June 18, 1933, along Horseshoe Run on the present day site of Camp Horseshoe and near the Horseshoe Run Recreation Area, where enrollees reportedly built the dam and reservoir, pavilion, pumps house and suspension bridge. Most of the original enrollees were from Ohio. Company 1524 remained at Lead Mine through May 15, 1934. At that time, it was transferred to the State Park system and relocated to Mathias, West Virginia. Company 1524 was located at Camp Hardy, on Lost River State Park.¹ Enrollees from Company 518 also completed work projects at the Horseshoe Run Recreation Area.

Civilian Conservation Corps Company 518 was organized at Fort Knox, Kentucky, May 3, 1933. The army officers in charge of the company were Captain John P. West, Commanding Officer, 1st Lieutenants Robert L. McClenaghan and Theodore R. C. King and 2nd Lieutenant Wilbur O. Thomas. Company 518 left Fort Knox by train on May 19, 1933, and arrived in Parsons on May 20, 1933. The camp site was in an old apple orchard close to the Parsons Tree Nursery, and was occupied by a group of locally enrolled men

¹Milton Harr, *The C.C.C. Camps in West Virginia 1933-1942*. (Charleston, W.Va.: Milton Harr, 1992), 7.

(LEM's). Tents were set up and camp was started.

Civilian Conservation Corps Company 518 was located at Parsons, West Virginia, and appropriately named Camp Parsons. It was the oldest Civilian Conservation Corps camp in the Fifth Corps Area and was the first camp in the Monongahela National Forest. It was operated by the United States Forest Service and was located next to the Parsons Tree Nursery and close to the Fernow Experimental Forest. It was unique in the fact that it shared a site with a non-Civilian Conservation Corps operation. In addition to the typical activities performed by many companies such as fire fighting, fire breaks and construction projects, the enrollees were involved in road building. The boys of Camp Parsons built several miles of completed and partially completed roads and trails along Elklick Run. Crushed rock was dumped, graded and then covered by layers of shale, each layer finer than the first. This held the road together in a more solid and smoother condition.

On Monday, May 22, 1933, the enrollees were turned over to the camp superintendent who was a Forest Service employee. Work started immediately on constructing the mess hall, bath house and latrines under the direction of Construction Superintendent L. A. Willis. Construction of the barracks started later in the summer and in September 1933, the Forest Service had finished erecting their buildings. All of the company buildings were completed by April 1934.

On May 24, 1934, S. W. Carpenter reported as the Educational Advisor of the camp. The Civilian Conservation Corps offered many educational opportunities to the enrollees. Many learned how to read and write, while others learned a trade or skill and found gainful employment after leaving the Corps. Active participation in educational classes was strongly encouraged. An educational staff was provided to each camp to teach basic courses in reading, writing and arithmetic and tradesmen offered vocational training in skills such as surveying, welding auto mechanics among others. The National Youth Administration (NYA) also participated in the educational activities of the camps.

The first side camp was established on Canaan Mountain on June 4, 1934, with 75 enrollees and one officer. A side camp was a temporary camp that was established to work on a particular project. The side camp would be located far enough away from the base camp to warrant its construction. Side camps were always tent camps since they were temporary. In November the side camp was disbanded and the men were sent to Glady Fork Camp and its size increased to 100 men.²

²“Camp Parsons Oldest in Fifth Corps Area.” *The Hollow Stump* Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1, 1935), 1+.

The Cheat District Garage for Forest Service vehicles was located at Camp Parsons until it was transferred to Neola, West Virginia, in July 1936.³ Having the garage located at Camp Parsons provided enrollees the opportunity to gain valuable experience working on Forest Service equipment and vehicles locally.

The nursery had an ideal location along the Black Fork of the Cheat River, about a mile from the Parsons City limits. The nursery was established in 1928 and was the largest of its kind at the time in the eastern United States. When established, it had a capacity of 1 million tree seedlings, but with the additional Civilian Conservation Corps work force the anticipated seed bed capacity for 1933 was 7½ million trees. There was an estimated 125,000 acres of burned land in the Monongahela National Forest and artificial reforestation was the only practical means of restoring a good timber crop.

The principal species grown at the nursery was red spruce, which is native to the area. Most of the red spruce grown was planted in the Monongahela National Forest. Other species grown include Norway pine which was sent to the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania, white pine, red pine, white spruce, hemlock, European larch and Japanese larch. Hard woods grown included red oak, white ash, black locust, black cherry and yellow poplar, and was sent to forests throughout the country.

³“Parsons Garage to be Moved to Neola Soon.” *Parsons CCC Times* Vol. 2, no. 2 (July 31, 1936), 1

Three recreational areas were also developed by Company 518. They include: Stuart Park, located near Shavers Fork of the Cheat River, close to Elkins; Bear Haven Recreation Area located on Bickle Knob, one of the highest points in the state; and, Horseshoe Forest Camp, located on Horseshoe Run nine miles north of Parsons. Camping, bathing, picnic and trailer facilities are available at these locations. Many of the first complete recreational sites in the Monongahela National Forest were constructed by the enrollees. The sites range from building heavy timber picnic tables for visitors to building complete forest camps.⁴ Herbert T. Stoddard of Cohasset, Massachusetts, was employed as the Recreation Staff Assistant to the Forest Supervisor in 1935. He was an excellent landscape architect and was responsible for the design and plans for all the recreation areas developed under the Civilian Conservation Corps program.⁵

Three wooden bridges were rebuilt on the Shavers Fork truck trail while a 65-foot wooden bridge was built at the Horseshoe Forest Camp. Also constructed at the Horseshoe Forest Camp was a 120-foot long picnic shelter. By 1938, enrollees had built or maintained 8.6 miles of Stuart Memorial Drive. They also maintained another 86 miles of truck trails and 70 miles of foot trails.

In response to the recreational demand at the Horseshoe Forest Camp, where nearly 20,000 swimmers, picnickers and campers used the area during the 1936 season, plans were drawn up to expand the camp during the winter of 1936. The natural swimming hole in Horseshoe Run was deepened and widened. A 120-foot suspension bridge was constructed to improve the trail system. Facilities for trailer and tent camping were installed by the time the camp was opened to the public in July 1937.⁶

⁴C.R. McKim, interviewed by David Gillio, March 1, 1991, Albuquerque, NM.

⁵McKim, *50 Year History of the Monongahela National Forest* (n.p., 1970), 54.

⁶“Fifth Forestry Camp Nearly Done,” *Charleston Gazette*, June 13, 1937.

In 1938, the Monongahela National Forest published its first recreation information pamphlet, "Time to Relax at the Forest Camps," which introduced the newly developed forest camps and the various facilities available to the public. The pamphlet informed prospective users that each forest camp was equipped with picnic tables and shelters, fireplaces for cooking, drinking water and sanitary facilities. Tent camping and swimming could also be enjoyed during June, July and August.⁷

Nine fire towers were constructed on the forest during the Civilian Conservation Corps years. The Bickle Knob Tower was constructed in 1933 by the enrollees.

Camp Parsons had a monthly newspaper called *The Hollow Stump*. It circulated from May 1935 until the name was changed to *Parsons CCC Times* in July 1936. Camp Parsons was in operation until 1941. As America's youth found gainful employment, it became harder and harder to get enrollees for the camps. The whole program was disbanded in July 1942, after the beginning of World War II.

Now, after 70 years since its inception, the pavilions, buildings, bridges, fire towers and trails, and other structures built by the enrollees of the Civilian Conservation Corps continue to serve the public. It was an unusual era in history where the unemployed of the Depression helped save and preserve America's natural resources for generations.

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⁷McKim, interview 1991.