

An Unanswerable Argument in Favor of Forests: Progressive Conservation, Compromise, and the 1903 Creation of Michigan's First Forest Reserve

by
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In the winter of 1894-1895, forester Austin Cary traveled through Michigan and Wisconsin collecting information on the remaining white-pine stands and cutover tracts for the U.S. Division of Forestry.¹ During his survey, he measured trees, checked stumps, and studied the soil, topography, and climate. He also assessed damage from fire and grazing in the cutover. After touring Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula, Cary stopped in Chicago at the offices of the *Northwestern Lumberman* to report his findings. From this study, he unequivocally concluded that white and Norway pine could be grown in the cutover again. He argued that if fire and grazing were eliminated from the cutover, then young seedlings could take root and thrive. Furthermore, if such work was done immediately, merchantable timber could be harvested in forty years.²

Although agricultural boosters and most lumbermen rejected Cary's call for reforestation, a group of forestry advocates coalesced around the progressive notion of public, scientific management of the cutover as opposed to private agricultural use. This small cadre of scientists, lumbermen, businessmen, politicians, farmers, and horticulturalists viewed the cutover with concern as homesteads began to revert to the state for unpaid property taxes. They suspected that agricultural boosters exaggerated the promises of farming the former pinery. Furthermore,

¹ At various times, "cutover" has been spelled as one word, two words, or as a hyphenated term. For the purposes of simplicity, I use it as one word (both as a noun and an adjective) unless quoting a text that has an alternate spelling.

² Norway pine is commonly referred to as red pine today. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), *1895 Report of the Chief of the Division of Forestry* (Washington: GPO, 1896), 149-150; "Reforestation Michigan Pine Lands," *Northwestern Lumberman*, February 9, 1895, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, Forest History Society (FHS), Durham, NC.

while industrialization balanced agriculture in the economy of southern Michigan, the northern half of the peninsula lagged behind as lumbering declined. Agriculture was not replacing logging as fast as many boosters had anticipated. In response, this body of progressives pushed forestry as the solution to the region's uncertain future.³ However, the debate was not between extra-local progressive elites and local landowners and businessmen. Supporters of both farming and forest land use could be found throughout Michigan and at every political, economic, and social level. In this evenly divided debate, mediated compromise was the means for creating broad support for the state's reforestation efforts, especially regarding Michigan's first forest reserve near Higgins Lake.

Early Conservation Politics in Michigan

The Republican Party dominated the political landscape of Michigan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1852 and 1933, the Democrats held the governor's office for only eight years, and the party lacked a statewide organization. Most meaningful political debates, therefore, happened within the Republican Party. Around the turn of the century, the Republican Party split into two factions. Senator James McMillan, a railroad and shipping tycoon from Detroit who had turned his attention and clout to politics, directed the party's machinery. His party stalwarts served the business interests in the state and were both fiscally and politically conservative. Legislators did not initiate new policies without McMillan's approval. Progressives comprised the other faction and sought to eliminate government corruption and favoritism to business, to expand municipal and state control of utilities, and to institute scientific management of state lands. The main leaders of this movement were Detroit newspaperman James Scripps, Grand Rapids politician William Alden Smith, and Hazen Pingree, who served terms both as Detroit's mayor and as Michigan's governor. As the party stalwarts had little interest in conservation issues, the support for government management of natural resources came from the Progressives.⁴

³ Norman John Schmaltz, "Cutover Land Crusade: The Michigan Forest Conservation Movement, 1899-1931" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1972) and Dave Dempsey, *Ruin & Recovery: Michigan's Rise as a Conservation Leader* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 49-64 discuss the politics of early reforestation efforts in Michigan.

⁴ Stephen B. Sarasohn and Vera H. Sarasohn, *Political Party Patterns in Michigan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1957), 8-16; Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Geoffrey

The national Progressive movement had two main areas of concern when it came to the environment—urban public health and conservation. Urban issues included pollution, sewage and sanitation, smoke abatement, and related public health issues. Conservation focused on the use and management of natural resources. Progressives considered Theodore Roosevelt's Forest Service chief Gifford Pinchot the preeminent leader in these efforts. His emphasis on the scientific management and efficient use of resources as the best way to stabilize the nation's economic fortunes was adopted by other progressives around the country as the basis on which to make policy changes.⁵ Scientists at the University of Michigan (UM) and Michigan Agricultural College (MAC) joined reform-minded businessmen and farmers to form the core of conservationists in Michigan.

Michigan conservationists identified three major concerns about the future of Michigan's forests during the 1890s. The first was economic. The precipitous decline of the lumber industry during the 1890s raised fears that the industry would be annihilated by early in the twentieth century. The lost jobs, tax base, and community wealth were a serious threat not only to the future of the cutover, but also to the state. Their second point of concern regarded the legal condition of property in the cutover. Timber theft and trespass were common, and the fine for people caught for the former offense was merely reimbursement for the timber cut, which hardly proved to be a deterrent. The legal condition of the land was complicated, as land reverted to the state for unpaid property taxes—a common strategy of lumbermen to dispose of hard-to-sell cutover lands—which shifted land management and/or sale to the state. Imperfect titles disrupted sales, and the state lacked an agency to manage these scattered parcels. Conservationists' third concern was scientific. Researchers at the UM and at the MAC expressed grave concern over the consequences of clear-cut logging of the state's northern interior. They viewed the lack of settlements in this section,

G. Drutchas, "Gray Eminence in a Gilded Age: The Forgotten Career of Senator James McMillan of Michigan," *Michigan Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 79-113.

⁵ Studies of Pinchot's life, work, and theories of conservation include Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947); Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959; repr. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999); Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington: Island Press, 2001). For Pinchot's views on the Michigan cutover, see "Michigan Lands Going to Waste," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, May 15, 1907, 1905 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, Carl Bajema private collection (CB).

particularly when coupled with the area's frequent forest fires, as a harbinger of disastrous long-term consequences because the fires eliminated second growth and damaged soil fertility, and there were few settlers to prompt the control of such conflagrations.⁶

Using these three concerns as a way to generate support, advocates of reforestation recruited a coalition of backers that could convince the state legislature of the importance of long-term natural resource planning. Appealing to farmers, academics, lumbermen, businessmen, sportsmen, and women's club members, leaders enlisted aid to change the state's land policy of disposal. The legislature directed the land commissioner to sell tax-reverted land to bolster property tax revenues. Forestry advocates wanted policies that withheld some of this reverted land from sale, reducing the flood of land on the market and its control by land speculators. In turn, by reforesting this land and preventing fire, the state would be reserving some forest land for later use. Hence, by the time settlement demanded this land, it would have produced a second growth of timber to be cut. In this way, foresters urged that waste be stopped and efficient use be maximized for the good of all concerned parties.⁷

A central figure among reforestation advocates was a Grand Rapids banker and the former co-director of the state's first forestry commission in the late 1880s, Charles Garfield. In an 1890 speech to the State Horticulture Society, Garfield called for an expansion of conservation efforts in the cutover. As a founding member and long-time secretary of this society of fruit growers from around the state, Garfield opened the evening session in Kalamazoo by recounting: "Governor [Cyrus] Luce once asked, speaking of forestry matters, 'Why don't your society come to Coldwater and talk to us about these questions?' 'Why,' I replied, 'you don't want us there. A few years ago we were there, and, some one having advocated the use of windbreaks and leaving of timber lots, the Branch County farmers present

⁶ Three clear examples of these concerns are Volney M. Spalding, "Presidential Address on a Natural History Survey of Michigan" (Ann Arbor: Inland, 1898); Arthur J. Hill, "The Pine Industry in Michigan," *Publications of the Michigan Political Science Association* 3, no. 4 (December 1898): 1-12; "Pirates of the Michigan Forests," *Detroit Journal*, February 17, 1900.

⁷ The elements of this idea appear throughout reforestation writings from 1886-1909. The first reference was Charles W. Garfield, "The Forestry Problem," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Horticulture Society of Michigan, 1886* (Lansing: W.S. George & Co., 1886), 60-128.

unanimously condemned both practices and favored cutting the last tree.' 'Well,' answered Mr. Luce, 'we don't feel that way now.'"

Garfield used this transaction with Governor Luce to indicate that more farmers desired expanded forest management and possibly reforestation. In this context, Garfield directed members toward supporting woodlots on their farms and reforestation legislation, despite the absence of a forestry association. Thereafter, other horticulture society members presented papers on the need for a distinct forest policy in the state, and forestry became a part of the society's work.⁸

Among the horticulturalists swayed by these demands for reforestation in the cutover was MAC professor William Beal. In the 1880s, agricultural issues facing the cutover were Beal's preeminent concern; but in the years following an 1888 botanical expedition, he found less success with his experiment station plantings than he had expected.⁹ He was unable to revitalize the soil quickly or in ways that would last. This failure caused Beal to conclude that more research would be necessary to prepare the land for agriculture. He encouraged reforestation of the cutover for a second growth of timber in the belief that, by harvest time, agricultural scientists would have determined the best ways to farm its sandy soils. With these goals in mind, he presented a paper at the annual meeting of the State Horticulture Society in 1894 advocating a permanent forestry commission. Beal argued that the cutting practices of lumbermen had negatively affected the condition of land in the state. He further concluded that farmers were not doing enough to maintain wood resources. He even admitted that MAC and other state agencies were neglecting the education of citizens about forestry problems and the need to establish long-term land policies. The only acceptable response, he asserted, was for the state to curtail cherished individual liberty for the good of society. He sarcastically stated, "Michigan, a state specially adapted to tree growing has done very little in this direction, except to permit everyone to cut and destroy as he chooses, provided he own[s] the land on which he operates. No matter if he leave[s] dead rubbish which in the next dry weather will most surely take fire and spread desolation for miles around. This is a

⁸ "Proceedings of State Conference in Kalamazoo, December 2-4, 1890," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Horticulture Society of Michigan, 1890* (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1890), 40-53.

⁹ For information on Beal's 1888 botanical expedition with Liberty Hyde Bailey and its emphasis on agricultural solutions for the cutover, see Joseph J. Jones, "Good for a National Cemetery: Questions of Land Use and an 1888 Botanical Expedition across Northern Michigan," *Agricultural History* 83, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 174-200.

free country!"¹⁰ Beal thus accepted the progressive idea that freedom depended on the condition of the community and did not mean that one was merely to act as one chose. The continuing economic vitality of the state required a commitment to the public good in terms of land management and reforestation.

Michigan Academy of Science president and UM botany professor Volney Spalding joined Garfield and Beal in advocating for forestry policy. Spalding had taught the first course in forestry in the United States in 1882 and authored and edited the first U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) bulletin on the white pine. This work made him well-respected in conservation circles.¹¹ In his Michigan Academy of Science presidential address in 1898, Spalding recounted the destruction of the northern pine forests and called for a natural history survey to identify the topography, flora, and fauna of Michigan. He feared that the state would become like Wisconsin, where less than one-tenth of the eight million acres of cutover was growing new timber and over seventy percent of land was unimproved for agriculture. Spalding wanted the scientific community to be involved by performing a low-cost natural history survey that would give the state government a clear assessment of Michigan's botanical and zoological conditions. This information would encourage reasonable government policy that would benefit all residents of the state. Spalding expected that those policies would include the establishment of forest reserves managed by the state and would be fully financed in the long term by timber sales. In presenting these conditions, Spalding challenged *laissez-faire* policies that demanded less government involvement in public issues which were popular in the state legislature at the time.¹²

¹⁰ William J. Beal, "The Needs of Michigan Forestry," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Horticulture Society of Michigan, 1894* (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1894), 124-129.

¹¹ Howard S. Reed, *Volney Morgan Spalding* (Binghamton, NY: privately published, 1919), 14-18 offers a brief overview of Spalding's life and a paragraph on his work in the forestry movement; Andrew D. Rodgers III, *Bernard Eduard Fernow: A Story of North American Forestry* (Durham, NC: Forest History Society, 1991), 46 mentions Spalding's forestry class at UM and his importance to the forest conservation movement in general; The USDA Bulletin, Volney M. Spalding, ed., *The White Pine* (Washington: GPO, 1899) is a botanical history and scientific assessment of the white pine. Contributing authors to the volume were Bernard Fernow, Filibert Roth, and F.H. Chittenden. Chittenden was an entomologist whose work impacted scientific understandings of the impact of insects on forests in Michigan.

¹² Spalding, "Presidential Address," 3-16. Spalding expected that scientists could perform the study for a low cost because the state had already built their laboratories and libraries and students could be used for much of the labor. The survey then would

Spalding's most significant contribution to the rise of the forest reserve movement in Michigan was his emphasis on emulating conservation work underway elsewhere. He pointed to the examples of forestry work being done in Europe, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Minnesota as examples of the work he hoped could be accomplished in Michigan. For example, New York and Connecticut had created forestry departments at state colleges to research the state's forestry needs. Pennsylvania provided tax breaks to encourage farmers to plant trees. New York and Pennsylvania had established forest reserves on land unused by agriculture to create a reliable supply of forest resources.¹³

The work in Wisconsin and Minnesota—states with similar climate, soil, and cutover conditions as Michigan—particularly influenced Spalding. From his perspective, Wisconsin had a robust government program in place to combat cutover problems, despite having worse conditions on the ground. Spalding believed Minnesota had been proactive in addressing its cutover because its leaders had anticipated the problems, as the state was the last of the three to reach its logging peak. He concurred with the assessment of Ernest Bruncken of the Wisconsin Forestry Commission that the sandy cutover land was worthless for agriculture because fertilizing the thin soil enough to create adequate production during a short growing season was too expensive. Even worse, the encouragement of settlement for agriculture created greater long-term problems by contributing to endemic poverty among settlers of the cutover. Immigrants were usually unprepared to farm the cutover, which land speculators and agricultural boosters had deceived them into believing was good agricultural land. Spalding quoted Bruncken as saying that “[t]o persuade ignorant settlers to locate on such land and try

function as a part of their research and teaching and would require little additional funding. Spalding used this alternative funding to challenge the state legislature's hands off approach and push it towards a more active engagement with social welfare.

¹³ Volney M. Spalding, “Progress in Forestry under State Control,” *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1900*, 70-83. The states that established forestry departments before Michigan were California (1885), New York (1885), Colorado (1885), Ohio (1885), Kansas (1887), Maine (1891), North Carolina (1891), Pennsylvania (1895), Minnesota (1895), and Wisconsin (1895). Several of these departments did not last, but by 1909, 26 states had forestry departments. Hence, the founding of a forestry commission in Michigan can be understood as being normative in the context of this work nationally. “State Forestry Department Data,” and “State Forest Administration,” State organization – State Forestry Legislation folder, Box 1, USFS Records of the State and Private Forestry Divisions, 95-98, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

to make them into farms is little short of a crime.”¹⁴ Thus, for Spalding, selling cutover land to private landowners was not a solution but a continuance of the problem.

In Spalding’s estimation, wildfire was an even bigger problem than the soil. He concluded that Minnesota’s main advantage over its neighbors was its aggressive fire prevention system overseen by a capable fire warden. Minnesotans understood the need to protect forests and encourage commercial use that would create a stable and diverse economy in the state. Such use would promote sustainable harvests while providing the raw materials for construction and manufacturing. In these ways, Spalding saw both Wisconsin and Minnesota as ahead of Michigan in establishing sound reforestation policies.

Spalding drew three conclusions about Michigan based on his understanding of the initiatives in other states. First, Michigan had to establish control over unused lands that were not appropriate for agriculture. To secure such land protected the interests of present and future citizens by creating timber and conserving pure water through erosion prevention. Second, he believed that the state should also initiate forest reserves on the most marginal lands and employ professional foresters, fire wardens, and trespass agents to promote and protect the growing forests. Finally, the state needed to create a school of forestry to research the cutover and to train foresters to work in the state for both preservation and commercial interests. These ideas were attractive to progressives because they would eliminate the waste of resources and instead manage them for use in industry to stabilize liberal capitalism.¹⁵

Spalding followed his demand for state action by calling a meeting to discuss these issues with additional parties. During the summer of 1898, several scientists, farmers, and government officials met with Spalding at the office of State Land Commissioner William French to discuss legislation. They agreed that the legislature would have to create a body specifically designed to address the forestry problems for progress to be made. These men formed a committee to draft a bill to be introduced in the legislature by Senator Robert Graham (R-Grand

¹⁴ Spalding, “Progress in Forestry,” 80. Bruncken ultimately wrote an influential book recounting the natural history of North American forests and promoting the use of scientific forestry as sound management of denuded lands. In it he argued how scientific forestry and the involvement of the state could address destructive issues like fire, timber theft, and excessive taxation. Ernest Bruncken, *North American Forests and Forestry: Their Relations to the National Life of the American People* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1908).

¹⁵ Spalding, “Progress in Forestry,” 80-83.

Rapids). Spalding chaired the committee and used his knowledge of legislation in other states to guide the bill's formulation. The committee selected Ira H. Butterfield, a prominent farmer from Lansing and a MAC trustee, to be secretary. Over the next several months, this committee drafted and revised the bill for the 1899 legislative session.¹⁶

The arguments of Garfield, Beal, and Spalding prompted some scientists and farmers to reconsider their assumptions about agriculture in the cutover. By December 1898, there was enough interest in the state's forestry problems for the State Horticulture Society to address them at its annual meeting in Ann Arbor. On the heels of Spalding's call for the state to focus on the forestry problem, Beal renewed his endorsement of a permanent forestry commission. He asserted that the attitude of citizens had changed regarding forestry. According to him, the continued problem was the lack of action on the part of the legislature. It had cut its sessions short in order to be economical, but these short sessions resulted in lawmakers ignoring forestry bills for a lack of time. Beal urged conference attendees to contact their legislators and demand support of the newly drafted bill.¹⁷

The degree to which the general public had changed their attitude towards forestry is unclear. However, interest was strong enough that the State Horticulture Society invited interested guests from the state colleges, the Michigan State Federation of Women's Clubs, sportsmen's organizations, and the state game commission to its annual meeting. These representatives followed Beal's address with short speeches in support of forestry related to the mission of each group.¹⁸ Fremont Skeels, the state agent of agricultural lands and a resident of Harrietta, located in the heart of the cutover, offered the audience an assessment of the current forestry conditions and their dire prospects. Skeels claimed that no original pine forests remained in the Lower Peninsula, and there was no prospect for new growth of mature forests. He identified two main problems the state needed to address before the situation improved: tax reversion and local politics. Northern Michigan had a high rate of property tax delinquency that in some cutover counties resulted in tax reversion to the state of up to half the land. The

¹⁶ "To Protect the Forests," *Detroit Journal*, November 19, 1898 and "Forestry in Michigan," *National Nurseryman*, November 28, 1898, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

¹⁷ William J. Beal, "A Few Things That Have Been Established Regarding the Management of Forests in Michigan," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Horticulture Society of Michigan, 1898* (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1898), 113-117.

¹⁸ "Proceedings of State Conference in Ann Arbor, December 6-8, 1898," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Horticulture Society of Michigan, 1898*, 246-262.

state did not have clear title to these lands, since former owners could reclaim ownership by paying their taxes up to fifteen years after the initial point of delinquency, which discouraged prospective buyers and dissuaded the state from investing in land improvements.¹⁹ Similarly, Skeels claimed that elected law enforcement officers in these northern counties were reluctant to enforce existing timber laws on remaining stands or maturing second-growth because the thieves were often the officers' friends, relatives, or even themselves. Ignoring timber theft inside their jurisdiction, these officials reinforced the popular notion of public land as commons for free use by citizens rather than the progressive vision of public land as reservations of resources.²⁰ After Skeels's speech, the society resolved to push the legislature to pass the bill creating a forestry commission, which would have the authority to address these issues independent of local desires. The society named Garfield as its representative to the legislature on this issue.²¹

Progressive newspapers from every major city around the state supported the push for government land management of the cutover.²² In the face of such support, the legislature passed the bill as Public Act 227 of 1899, creating a state forestry commission. Additionally, the bill

¹⁹ Ibid., 262-269 and "Old Timber Land," *Grand Rapids Press*, November 6, 1900, Box 21, Michigan Forestry Commission folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

²⁰ For an elaboration on such an understanding of the commons that was prevalent in the United States during the nineteenth century, see Steven Hahn, "Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging: Common Rights and Class Relations in the Postbellum South," *Radical History Review* 26 (1982): 37-64; Robert McCullough, *The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 14-35; Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-20; Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 193-198. All these authors agree that the commons were not as "open to all" or abused by local residents as popular history often suggests.

²¹ "Proceedings of State Conference in Ann Arbor, December 6-8, 1898," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Horticulture Society of Michigan, 1898*, 262-269.

²² For examples of editorial support in state newspapers, see "Our Pine Slashes," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, February 21, 1899, "For Tree Protection," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, March 4, 1899, "Reforest the Slashes," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, April 17, 1899, "Guard the Forests," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, May 8, 1899, "To Save the Trees," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, October 6, 1899, nineteenth century binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB; "Let Us have a Forestry Commission," *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1898, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS; "Forestry and Fisheries," *Grand Rapids Herald*, April 28, 1899, "For a Forestry Commission," *Chicago Inter Ocean*, May 1, 1899, "Forestry Commission," *Saginaw Courier*, May 3, 1899, Box 21, Michigan Forestry Commission folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

authorized the formation of a temporary forest reserve. The commission included the state land commissioner and two representatives, one selected by the MAC board of trustees and the other chosen by the UM regents. This condition fused the state with its public colleges in completing conservation work. The commission's budget was only a few hundred dollars, and members were unpaid. A member-elected president directed its work and submitted biannual reports to the governor, who had oversight of the commission. The mere creation of this body was a victory for advocates of progressive reform. The commission lasted less than ten years, but its work laid the foundation for the future of forestry in the state.²³

The Work of the State Forestry Commission

With the demise of the first forestry commission in 1888, forestry advocates lobbied the legislature to create a second commission with more power. Yet the new Michigan Forestry Commission (MFC) consisted of only three men who had little power to enact new land use policies. Charles Garfield, the long-time reforestation advocate from Grand Rapids, presided over the commission with the help of Saginaw lumberman Arthur Hill. The third member was the state land commissioner, who served as secretary (William French, who supported the creation of a state forest reserve, was the first man to hold this post on the commission).²⁴ Most meetings were held at the State Land Office in Lansing, including the first on September 30, 1899.²⁵

²³“Michigan State Forestry Commission – A History,” Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, State Archives of Michigan (SAM). Though there is no definitive proof, it is likely that Charles Garfield wrote this brief history. This development is also discussed by William B. Botti and Michael D. Moore, *Michigan's State Forests: A Century of Stewardship* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2006), 4-5. State progressive newspapers lauded the passage of the bill. For examples, see “Forestry Commission,” *Grand Rapids Democrat*, May 11, 1899, “Forestry Commission,” *Detroit Journal*, May 24, 1899, “Forestry Commission,” *Sault Ste. Marie News*, May 27, 1899, Box 21, Michigan Forestry Commission folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

²⁴ The commissioner of the state land office was an elected position. From 1897 until the commission was abolished on January 1, 1915, the men who held the office were William French (1897-1900), Edwin Wildey (1901-1904), William Rose (1905-1908), Huntley Russell (1909-1912), and Augustus Carton (1913-1914).

²⁵ This discussion of the State Forestry Commission comes from the commission's meeting minutes and reports. For another account see Schmalz, “Cutover Land Crusade,” 137-163, 348-361.

The MFC had two related goals: to educate state residents on cutover problems and to create a state forest reserve that demonstrated how scientific forestry could resolve these problems. Garfield sought to achieve the first goal by networking with prominent citizens throughout the state, recruiting assistance from national experts in forestry, and convincing one of the state colleges to create a forestry department. He took on these tasks in an ambitious letter-writing campaign, while French gathered information on Michigan forestry from newspaper clippings, forestry articles, and books. In preparation for creating a reserve, Garfield requested that the State Land Office identify and map vacant homesteads and swamp lands in northern lower Michigan, so that the commission would know what land the state already controlled before making plans for it.²⁶

By early 1900, this work was underway. French completed land maps and started a clippings book. In accordance with the law's instruction to create a reserve, he also withheld from sale all the available land in western Roscommon County. Garfield wrote over five hundred letters soliciting input from prominent men and women involved in politics at the local or state level, in the lumber industry, or among the conservation advocacy organizations that had supported the creation of the commission. He used their replies to form four platforms adopted by the commission. These positions all focused on the work necessary to create a forest reserve and remained at the forefront of the commission's work for the next decade. First, the land office needed a new survey of the properties to perfect titles of state lands and to proceed with the condemnation of tax-reverted lands to clear the titles for other sale or use. The survey would also serve to resolve any boundary disputes and discrepancies. Second, the legislature had to pass better statutes to provide for the protection of the land from forest fires. Third, laws regarding trespass and theft in private and public forests had to be stiffened and aggressively enforced. And fourth, the state needed to address the burden of local property taxes, as low rates of ownership resulted in high taxes. These high rates, in turn, discouraged long-term forestry practices on private lands.²⁷

All of these recommendations required legislative action, so Garfield recruited the assistance of Grand Rapids attorney Charles Blair

²⁶ "Minutes, September 30, 1899," Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM.

²⁷ "Minutes, January 3, 1900" and "Minutes, April 25, 1900," Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM.

to identify the legal questions pertaining to the creation of a possible reserve. Blair recommended securing clear titles first. With the help of a fellow Grand Rapids lawyer, Arthur Denison, Blair drafted several working bills to generate discussion with legislators and other experts. Garfield, Spalding, and Skeels also gathered information on legislation and forestry practices in other states and at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, as a way to direct the development of policies in Michigan.²⁸

Using these recommendations as a guide, Garfield wrote an educational primer on forestry for Michigan citizens—particularly the residents of the southern part of the state—to highlight the magnitude of the problem. In the text Garfield outlined the four issues related to forestry and encouraged citizen involvement in making scientific forestry the management policy both for the state and for individual landowners. He included essays from national experts such as Spalding, Pinchot, and Carl Schenck, the founder of the Biltmore Forest School, as well as pledges of support from various politicians and newspaper editors. Furthermore, through the primer Garfield proposed that farmers across the state plant woodlots to form windbreaks and to prevent soil erosion. He also urged larger plantings in northern Michigan and along lakeshores to prevent blowing sand and to reinvigorate lumbering as a permanent business in the state. The commission sent the primer, paid for with part of its appropriation, to newspapers for wider publication, to women's and sportsmen's clubs for distribution among their members, and to prominent legislative and business officials. Garfield's goal was to generate a wide enough circulation that it would prompt state residents to lobby their elected officials to address the problems the forestry advocates faced.²⁹

Garfield's educational efforts did not end with the primer. He also believed that the state needed professionals educated in the science of forestry who to be available to complete work on both public and private lands and who could train the men who would continue developing the state's forestry policies. To this end, he contacted the presidents and governing boards at UM and MAC and encouraged them to create departments of forestry. The Board of Agriculture, under the

²⁸ "Minutes, November 2, 1900" and "Minutes, December 27, 1900," Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM; "Are Hard at Work," *Grand Rapids Herald*, November 3, 1900, Box 21, Michigan Forestry Commission folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

²⁹ Charles W. Garfield, *A Little Talk about Michigan Forestry* (Lansing: Michigan State Forestry Commission, 1900[?]), 5-7, 10-20.

direction of the president and the agricultural professors at MAC, opined that forestry education was being adequately handled by William Beal, who had been professor of botany and forestry at MAC since 1880. Despite Garfield's personal belief that his alma mater (MAC) was the better fit for a forestry program, he also submitted his recommendation to friends at UM. There the president and regents were enthusiastic about the prospect of a nationally-recognized department in this burgeoning field.³⁰

Borrowing from the land grant model, Garfield developed a plan to pay for the new department at UM with land. The plan depended on lumber companies donating land rather than having sections of land designated by the state or universities for educational use. He proposed that lumbermen deed lands to the colleges after the lands were cut but before they became delinquent for taxes. Lumbermen would thereby avoid future property tax bills on cutover lands, and the state in turn would not have to pursue unpaid taxes or be saddled with imperfect titles, as was so often the case with property that reverted to the state due to tax delinquency. Additionally, the university would have a ready-made field laboratory for forestry research that would attract the best faculty and students. According to Garfield, after ten years of forestry management the land would produce fence posts and telegraph poles that would pay for the forestry department. Once the forest produced timber, the university could use the sale of its products as an endowment to defray other university costs and to reduce the tax burden for public higher education.³¹

Garfield and the UM regents used their connections to urge lumbermen to join the program. Convincing them to donate cutover land was easy because the lumbermen considered it worthless, and such donations disposed of lands without the stigma of unpaid taxes or the hassle of trying to sell the land in a buyers' market. Grand Rapids lumberman Delos Blodgett donated 35,000 cutover acres in Crawford and Roscommon counties. Other owners near the headwaters of the Au Sable River had added another 5,000 acres by January 1901. These donations convinced the UM regents to establish a chair of forestry.

³⁰ Michigan Forestry Commission letter book, Charles W. Garfield papers, Bentley Historical Library (BHL); Michigan State College, *Fifty Years of Forestry at Michigan State College* (East Lansing: MSC, 1953).

³¹ "Deed Land," *Detroit Tribune*, September 4, 1900, "Waste Timber Lands for the University," *Detroit Free Press*, December 22, 1900, "The Forestry Problem," and "A Department of Forestry," *Saginaw News*, December 22, 1900, Box 22, University of Michigan folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

That June, the legislature passed the Concurrent Resolution of 1901, which designated the MFC as responsible for the management and care of donated and tax delinquent acres in the northern half of the state. While the commission would be responsible for the work done there, UM and MAC would garner the benefits of any revenues from the lands donated to them. Thus schools would be freed from the day-to-day management of the land while reaping the economic benefits of the commission's work.³²

The university offered lectures in the summer of 1901 as a first step toward forming a curriculum of study in forestry. UM appointed Alma College botanist Charles Davis the first chair of forestry, and he quickly developed a forestry curriculum based on his work on donated lands near Higgins Lake. By fall 1902, the university had established a forestry department. While Davis handled these duties admirably, he understood that the university sought a trained forester to fill the position of chair permanently. To this end, UM hired alumnus (and Spalding's former student) Filibert Roth in 1903. Roth's work as a USDA forester and as a Cornell professor, plus his knowledge and experience working in Michigan forests, made him the logical choice to lead UM's forestry department.³³ His connections to USDA Division of Forestry chief Bernhard Fernow, to Pinchot, and to other national foresters helped Roth market the program nationally and place students in federal jobs after graduation. Furthermore, this post made him a leading advocate for reforestation and forestry education in Michigan and across the United States over the next twenty years.³⁴

As the program at UM developed, newspaper editors began to question why MAC was not creating the same kind of endowment from cutover land, especially since it was the state's land grant college and was initially supported almost exclusively from the sale of timber lands.

³² "U of M to Have a Chair of Forestry," *Detroit Free Press*, January 18, 1901, "Forestry Department," *Grand Rapids Herald*, January 19, 1901, "Chair in Forestry," *Grand Rapids Press*, January 23, 1901, Box 22, University of Michigan folder, USFS Clippings File, FHS.

³³ "To Plan its Work," *Grand Rapids Press*, May 9, 1901, "The Forestry Commission," *Jackson Patriot*, July 30, 1901, Box 21, Michigan Forestry Commission folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS; "Prof. Davis Does for Well Trained College Foresters," *Grand Rapids Herald*, February 2, 1902, "Forestry Department is Negotiating for Some Land," *Ann Arbor Times*, February 27, 1902, Box 22, University of Michigan folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

³⁴ For a complete overview of the first thirty years of developments in the forestry department at UM, see Norman J. Schmaltz, "Academia Gets Involved in Michigan Forest Conservation," *The Michigan Academician* 12, no. 1 (Summer 1979): 25-46.

These criticisms prompted the MAC trustees to pursue their own forestry department. In order to avoid the appearance of following UM's lead, the board proposed a department focused on farm forestry research and extension. They appointed Ernest E. Bogue professor of forestry in 1902, and Bogue initiated a program of extension forestry and planted a nursery on campus the following year. Despite being less involved in the forest reserve than UM, foresters at MAC aided the MFC in outreach efforts to state farmers. They reforested wastelands on or near farms and used demonstration plantings to generate support among farmers, particularly in southern Michigan.³⁵

Within two years the state had departments of forestry at its two major public colleges. The UM program trained professional foresters, while MAC taught courses and conducted research on how to grow and use woodlots on Michigan farms. Because of these different curricular goals, Roth was involved in the policies of the forestry commission, while Bogue and his successor, J. Fred Baker, were more focused on species research and farm forest issues. These two departments trained the foresters who initiated state management plans for cutover lands during the first half of the twentieth century.³⁶

Creation of the State Forest Reserve

The work of inculcating conservation as an ideal among both politicians and progressive citizens was a positive side effect of the MFC's primary goal of establishing the state's first forest reserve. Reforestation advocates considered conservation both practical and economical, but few landowners could afford to dedicate marginal land to reforestation. Landowners also were ill-informed about the benefits of tree planting. Foresters considered the construction of a reserve managed by the state the best way to accomplish desired reforestation. This adoption of the state apparatus to impose its will on the land was

³⁵ MSC, *Fifty Years of Forestry*, 6-7, 12-13, 28-29. The nursery started by Bogue in 1903 was later named for him.

³⁶ In addition to Schmaltz, "Academia Gets Involved," issues of *The University of Michigan Forester* and *The Michigan Forester* published by UM Forestry Club offer the best information on the nature of forestry education during the early-twentieth century at the university. See also "Eight Are Placed," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, July 4, 1907, 1905 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB about the hiring of the department's first graduates by the USFS. For the early history of forestry at MAC, see MSC, *Fifty Years of Forestry*.

consistent with progressive notions of state-building as a means to generate reform.³⁷

The site for the reserve was a cutover portion of Roscommon and Crawford counties near the headwaters of the Muskegon River.³⁸ Garfield directed French to withhold land in this area from sale and to assess it. In the late summer of 1901, Garfield, French, Hill, Spalding, Davis, and Skeels—along with Thomas Sherrard of the U.S. Division of Forestry and Frank Sparks, a reporter for the *Grand Rapids Herald*—joined surveyors on an inspection of the region. This wedding of federal and state agencies with university experts symbolized the evolving character of the conservation movement in Michigan.³⁹ The heterogeneous team found a devastated landscape, just as the 1888 botanical expedition had. Most of the region that was not swampland had been burned over repeatedly. Oak, aspen, and jack pine dominated forest regeneration, but the trees had not matured to the point of having commercial value. Sweet fern, blueberries, and sedges covered the most recently burned land. The men concluded that the area was not suitable for agriculture because of the destruction caused by the repeated fires. However, they asserted that successful reforestation was likely if fire could be prevented and appropriate seedlings secured.⁴⁰

In the wake of the excursion, Garfield hired Davis to increase tree growth in the region through natural regeneration, planting, and fire prevention. Davis undertook the scientific research, while Maxim Pion of Big Rapids, hired as state fire warden during the summer of 1902, handled the on-the-ground fire prevention. From August to October Pion patrolled the preserve and took steps to combat fires. These efforts

³⁷ For an elaboration on conservation, progressive action, and state-building see Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 261-276 and Brian Balogh, "Scientific Forestry and the Roots of the Modern American State: Gifford Pinchot's Path to Progressive Reform," *Environmental History* 7, no. 2 (April 2002): 198-225.

³⁸ As a member of the state legislature in 1881, Garfield had tried to get that body to accept the same site as a donation for a reserve. The proposal did not gain any traction at the time. Eventually, other land reverted to the state for taxes by 1901. Garfield and the MFC were able to use it and donated land to get the reserve that he had desired twenty years earlier.

³⁹ William J. Beal, "Report of the Botanist," *Annual Report of the Michigan Board of Agriculture, 1888*, 171-193; MFC, "Annual Report of the Commission," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1901* (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Co., 1901), 3-4; "The Pine Barrens," *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, September 30, 1901, 1900 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB; Thomas H. Sherrard, "The Michigan Forest Reserve," *Forestry and Irrigation* 8, no. 10 (Oct. 1902): 404-411.

⁴⁰ MFC, "Annual Report," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1901*, 3-4; Sherrard, "The Michigan Forest Reserve," 404-411.

were the first steps towards transforming Michigan's cutover through conservation.⁴¹

For Garfield, the small forest reserve near Higgins Lake was significant because it would publicize the MFC's work and generate more national and state support for the conservation movement in Michigan. Not coincidentally, the American Forestry Association (AFA) held its annual meeting in Lansing on August 28-29, 1902.⁴² The meeting addressed key aspects of Garfield's emerging reforestation policy, giving Michigan's commissioner precisely the kind of support he needed to make a better case for a larger reserve. In particular, federal officials Sherrard and Roth presented essays advocating fire prevention and reforestation. Sherrard assessed the forest reserve based on his examination of it during the summer of 1901. He concluded that success in management depended "so entirely upon effective fire protection that the organization should aim first of all to provide a competent fire service." Sherrard also recognized that a lack of funds meant that this protection could not come from the county or township governments, but was completely dependent on the state. Roth asserted that the jack pine plains located throughout northern Michigan were only good for trees, and that agriculture was futile there because "sand is sand, and sand only." The soil was unpredictable and offered only fleeting independence to immigrants who hoped to homestead it. He instead urged the state to foster the growth of jack pine for a steady supply of fuel, ties, and fence posts, while the land was prepared for more profitable trees like white and Norway pine. Roth and, to some extent Sherrard, both embraced the notion that the cutover could be developed economically by farming trees that had high market value.⁴³

⁴¹ "Minutes, September 30, 1901" and "Minutes, December 31, 1901," Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM. At these meetings the commission discussed Davis's work and the invitation to the American Forestry Association for their annual meeting; "Minutes, July 31, 1902" and "Minutes, August 18, 1902," Box 1, Folder 2, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM. These meeting minutes recount the hiring of Pion and arrangements for the AFA meeting and the excursion to the forest reserve and Mackinac Island.

⁴² "Minutes, July 31, 1902" and "Minutes, August 18, 1902," Box 1, Folder 2, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM.

⁴³ Papers from the conference were published in *Forestry and Irrigation*, the journal of the American Forestry Association, in the October 1902 issue. Sherrard, "The Michigan Forest Reserve," 404-411 and Filibert Roth, "The Jack Pine Plains of Michigan," *Forestry and Irrigation* 8, no. 10 (Oct. 1902): 413-416. Roth's speech was also published in *Annual*

After hearing lectures describing the cutover and lauding forestry, attendees were invited to see the reserve as an illustration of Michigan's program and offer their suggestions for improvement. Twenty-seven men and women boarded a train in Lansing on the evening of August 29 and traveled to Bay City, where they spent the night. The following morning they proceeded to the reserve, where they were joined by William Mather, president of the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company. The company owned extensive forested and cutover tracts that supplied timber supports for its shaft mines and charcoal for its blast furnaces.⁴⁴ Members of the excursion completed a full inspection of the area, which included viewing abandoned farms and the reforestation work at the reserve. Afterward they continued north to Mackinac Island, where they adjourned the conference and enjoyed rest and relaxation at the state's most luxurious tourist destination. This field trip was important because it gave experts who attended the conference a concrete example of the problems associated with the cutover and with Michigan's attempted solutions. This connection to national experts who had seen the cutover for themselves provided the MFC with significant expert advice and endorsement over the next several years.⁴⁵

Newspapers from the major cities in southern Michigan published articles and editorials supporting the work of the commission. They printed the text of speeches and letters from national and state experts regarding the problems of the cutover and the merits of reforestation, and they recounted the legislative debates on forestry bills and the activities of the forestry commission.⁴⁶ Newspapers also reprinted essays

Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1902 (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Co., 1902), 34-37.

⁴⁴ In addition to his interest in conservation, Mather explored the possible agricultural uses for his company's cutover land. The efforts of Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company in agricultural promotion were discussed in Terry S. Reynolds, "Quite an Experiment: A Mining Company's Attempt to Promote Agriculture on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, 1895-1915," *Agricultural History* 80, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 64-98.

⁴⁵ "Minutes, August 28, 1902," Box 1, Folder 2, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM.

⁴⁶ Select examples include "His Policy," *Detroit Tribune*, December 8, 1900, "Reforestation in Michigan," *Grand Rapids Press*, February 11, 1901, "The Michigan Forests," *Jackson Patriot*, August 28, 1901, "Save the Young Forest," *Detroit Free Press*, July 8, 1902, "Gov. Bliss on Forestry," *Detroit Free Press*, August 30, 1902, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS; "Forest Reserve," *Detroit News*, November 5, 1900, "To Save the Trees," *Grand Rapids Press*, December 1, 1900, "Forestry Commission," *Kalamazoo Telegraph*, August 2, 1901, "News of the Week," *Plymouth Weekly*, August 24, 1901, "Forestry Report," *Lansing Journal*, December 2, 1902, Box 21, Michigan Forestry Commission folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

from prominent supporters such as Garfield, Beal, and Skeels.⁴⁷ Editorials in support of reforestation appeared from citizens and newspaper editors.⁴⁸ These articles and editorials undoubtedly furthered Garfield's goal of public education and broadened the support of state-sanctioned reforestation in Michigan.

Praise for Michigan's reforestation effort extended well beyond the state's borders. Easterners wrote about it in reference to the former pineries in New England and progressive efforts in that region. Urban Westerners saw Michigan's cutover as a warning regarding resource use in their area, while Midwesterners connected timber as a resource with their region's fortunes in manufacturing. Even commemorations of former Governor Pingree after his June 1901 death in London noted that a central goal of his trip had been to learn the lessons of conservation to be found in Europe and North Africa.⁴⁹ All of these references demonstrated the broad support Michigan's reforestation efforts received from urban progressives nationwide.

While urban newspapers lauded the reforestation of northern Michigan and the import of expert assistance, local residents near the reserve opposed it as a threat to their communities devised by wealthy state officials and national forestry experts. Local leaders felt that forestry would repel settlers by signaling that the land was unfit for agriculture—a premise they did not accept. William Johnson of Roscommon invited Garfield to come and see his farm as evidence of good farming in the county. Johnson also promised to take Garfield on a tour of the county to demonstrate that his farm was not an anomaly. Locals considered this defense of the land necessary because tax-reverted or publicly-owned land would not provide the money to support infrastructure like roads and schools. Therefore, residents

⁴⁷ Charles W. Garfield, "Michigan Problem," *Grand Rapids Democrat*, May 21, 1900, Fremont E. Skeels, "The Forestry Problem," *Michigan Tradesman*, December 12, 1900, W. J. Beal, "The Duty of Michigan in Regard to Forestry," *State Affairs*, January 29, 1901, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

⁴⁸ T. Greiner, "Reforesting Denuded Lands," *Farm and Fireside*, September 1, 1900, A.G. Bottomley, "Protest Against the Destruction of Trees," *Michigan Farmer*, January 5, 1901, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

⁴⁹ "The End of a Forest," *San Francisco Call*, October 12, 1900, "Scientific Forestry," *Providence Journal*, November 21, 1900, "Wasting Forests," *Boston Evening Herald*, November 23, 1900, "Michigan Forest Reserves," *Farmers' Review* (Chicago), December 26, 1900, "Pingree's Purpose Abroad," *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1901, "Pingree's Great Plans," *Boston Post*, June 21, 1901, "Alger Offers his Services," *Baltimore Sun*, February 10, 1902, Box 21, Michigan Forests and Forestry folder, USFS Newspaper Clippings File, FHS.

considered the forest reserve a threat to land values and community development.⁵⁰

Supporters of reforestation who understood sentiment in these communities tried to warn the MFC of this resistance. Burton Livingston of Grayling wrote to Garfield in the summer of 1902 to warn him that locals did not support the work of the commission or of forestry in general. Likewise, Skeels observed a “feeling of enmity” toward the MFC’s work in Roscommon County despite residents’ struggles to make farming pay. He observed that some people stripped the second-growth trees in the area to sell to woodenware companies. This act brought in much-needed cash and made a statement against reforestation.⁵¹

In the face of this opposition, Garfield reiterated that the MFC’s work was not intended to exclude other uses in these areas. He averred that agriculture should remain the primary goal for the region, but in places not suitable for it the state should convert the land into forests. These sentiments were most fully expressed in the MFC’s 1900 report, which read: “The Commission has no idea of recommending that the State go into forestry upon lands that are valuable for agricultural purposes; but from its investigation, it is satisfied that immense tracts of non-agricultural land exist in the State which can be used in the growth of forests, and which, if managed in a business way, will in time return to the State a good interest upon the investment necessary for this care, and incidentally will add largely to the value of the State by affecting favorably its agriculture, its horticulture, and its commerce.”⁵² Despite these efforts to reassure locals that the commission did not want to undermine their farms, residents intensified their opposition to a forest reserve in their communities.

Opposition crystallized as the American Forestry Association tour approached, drawing prominent locals into open debate with the MFC over the future of the cutover. Residents mounted their own public relations campaign to counter Garfield’s claims regarding the merits of a

⁵⁰ Letter from William Johnson to Charles Garfield, May 21, 1900, in Michigan Forestry Commission letter book, Charles W. Garfield papers, BHL.

⁵¹ Letter from Burton E. Livingston to Charles Garfield, August 13, 1902, in Michigan Forestry Commission letter book, Charles W. Garfield papers, BHL; Fremont E. Skeels, “Conditions in the Forest Reserve,” *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1902*, 40-47.

⁵² Charles W. Garfield, Arthur Hill, and William French, “Official Report to the Governor,” *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1900* (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Co., 1900), 17. This sentiment was common in many early commission publications.

forest reserve. Charles DeWaele, the Republican prosecuting attorney in Roscommon, wrote a letter that he distributed to newspaper editors around the state. DeWaele derided the work of the MFC as misguided and unfairly targeting the Roscommon area. He challenged the commission's characterization of the area as "worthless pine barrens" as "contemptible slander." DeWaele asserted that Roscommon County was instead "destined to become one of the leading counties in the state from an agricultural and mineral standpoint." He blamed the area's problems on lumbermen who had failed to pay taxes on the land they owned and clear cut. These back taxes made purchasing the land prohibitive for settlers because the tax code at the time required purchasers not only to pay for the land but also the delinquent taxes on it. According to DeWaele, the MFC's desire to pull land from sale and designate it as a forest reserve would just remove more land from the tax rolls. This land policy would undermine the tax base enough to decimate the region's schools and local infrastructure if residents did not contest it. Without schools, roads, and functioning local government, even settlers on prosperous farms would be forced to vacate their homes. In DeWaele's estimation, the motto of forestry advocates was that "Roscommon must be destroyed."⁵³

DeWaele's argument had some merits. The lumber industry had indeed skinned the trees and stopped paying taxes on the land. Furthermore, the state held some of the blame for its prohibitive property tax code and land purchase policy. Lumbermen had failed to pay property taxes on cutover lands, which had reverted to the state, and the penalty of having to pay unpaid property taxes assuredly made some land in the county too expensive for potential settlers. However, lumber companies were not the only entities that abandoned land, and DeWaele overstated the agricultural fortunes of Roscommon County. Farm abandonment from underproduction was also a significant drain on the county's tax receipts, and that loss in tax revenue also contributed to the

⁵³ Charles L. DeWaele, "The Pioneer Must Be Protected," *Crawford Avalanche*, August 28, 1902, Newspaper Microfilm Room, Library of Michigan (LOM), 4. Descriptions of this opposition appeared in newspapers around the state. For example, see "They Don't Like It," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, August 30, 1902, 1900 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB; In a letter to the editor, C.D. McLouth of Muskegon, who went on the expedition to the reserve, offered support for the MFC on this issue. "Practical Forestry," *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, September 4, 1902, 1900 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB.

problems DeWaele anticipated—poor roads and schools and a local government unable to function.⁵⁴

The MFC had not expected much resistance from local residents, whom they felt would benefit the most from these plans. Rather, Garfield and Hill thought opposition to a forest reserve would come from taxpayers in other sections of the state objecting to its expense. Garfield prepared a special essay in response to criticism for the commission's 1902 report. He argued that the northern Lower Peninsula was the MFC's focus because the southern Lower Peninsula was already being used for agriculture, while the Upper Peninsula was primarily tied to mining. Roscommon and Crawford counties were particularly well-suited to this work because they contained the headwaters of several major rivers that ran to both Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. Thus they were vital to conservation work in the state. In addition, Garfield argued that lands removed from the tax rolls by the state were in tax default and not generating tax receipts anyway. Therefore, rather than causing schools and local infrastructure to fail, efforts at reforestation were actually an attempt to address this problem by stabilizing the economy through removing unreliable land from sale to settlers. According to Garfield, the MFC selected the region as a prime location to demonstrate the possibilities of reforestation, with hopes that the movement would spread.⁵⁵

In the face of broader resistance than he expected, Garfield cited three objections he considered poisonous to the movement. First was the accusation that the MFC's work was merely a scheme to create a haven for rich sportsmen. Another objection was that the commission was turning valuable agricultural land into forests for the lumber firms. A third concern was that the removal of land from the tax rolls was an effort to drive out successful farmers with excessive taxation for local infrastructure and services. Garfield contended that these objections demonstrated a lack of understanding of the MFC and its work. He insisted that the land in question had experienced a steady cycle of ownership and abandonment, and that many eminent scientists from the state's colleges and government agencies had studied its soil, water,

⁵⁴ Information on tax reversion is available in the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of the Land Office of the State of Michigan* (Lansing: Robert Smith Co., 1898-1914) from 1900 until 1914 when the office was closed. Information on farm production for Roscommon County was gleaned from *1894 State of Michigan Agricultural Census* (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1896) and *Federal Farm Census of 1935* (Washington: Bureau of the Census, 1935).

⁵⁵ Charles W. Garfield, "The Forestry Point of View," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1902*, 59-60.

plants, and trees for the past twenty years, questioning the area's merits for agriculture and endorsing reforestation. Furthermore, MFC members did not benefit monetarily from reforestation, and Garfield claimed that reforestation was good for all state residents because it created abundant resources and jobs for locals in tree-planting, fire prevention, resort work, and ultimately lumbering. According to Garfield, these ends were more stable than unproductive farming or the selfish goals of local leaders who wanted to profit from unwitting new settlers.⁵⁶

Garfield's claims in the 1902 report, while impassioned, did not recognize the struggles faced by local settlers and community leaders even if the reserve was successful. Residents battled the soil for a living and, as in other frontier environments, hard work did not guarantee economic success. Meanwhile, community merchants and businessmen had depended on settlers for their livelihoods ever since the lumber industry had left the region. Each of these groups was threatened by the MFC's suggestion that their work was in vain, and their diatribes against reforestation at this point reflected their overall lack of a political voice in the process. The forest reserve had been negotiated and supported by lumbermen, businessmen, scientists, and conservationists. Local residents legitimately feared that reforestation would benefit these extra-locals who had crafted the plans. Even if a state forest reserve could renew the harvest of trees, locals would benefit only from seasonal work in the forest. Furthermore, equitable taxation was a concern for every group involved in the region. Some of the residents' fears were therefore legitimate, and the MFC needed to address them definitively before it could securely establish the reserve in Roscommon and Crawford counties.

The MFC avoided an impasse by inviting a citizens' committee to Lansing to forge a compromise, thus setting the tone for the state's future efforts at revitalizing the cutover. Unlike conservationists in other parts of the nation, conservationists in Michigan attempted to meet the needs of at least the leading members of the cutover community. On April 8, 1903, forty farmers and residents of Roscommon and Crawford counties descended on the House chamber to object to the proposed forest reserve.⁵⁷ In light of these objections, the MFC invited select conservationists and a group representing those residents opposed to the reserve to meet at the State Land Office in Lansing. Garfield and

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-62.

⁵⁷ "Fight for Homes," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, April 9, 1903, 1900 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB.

State Land Commissioner Edwin Wildey represented the MFC, and they were joined by William Beal and Ernest Bogue from MAC, along with Filibert Roth, who was still employed by the U.S. Division of Forestry but who would soon become more involved in Michigan reforestation as the State Forest Warden and professor of forestry at UM. Heading the citizens' group were Henry Woodruff and William Johnson of Roscommon and Oscar Palmer of Grayling, publisher of the *Crawford Avalanche*, the region's most prominent newspaper. Each of these men had served as state representatives, though none held office in 1903.⁵⁸

The two groups met to discuss the content of the Farr Bill, which set the boundaries of the forest reserve and officially turned control of the land over to the MFC. The commission proposed that the reservation be three and a half townships in size. The citizens' group countered with a proposal of three townships, two and a half of which were the same as in the commission's proposal.⁵⁹ They asserted that if the MFC approved the sections they selected, they would support the commission's work. After a short deliberation, the MFC agreed. The Farr Bill was redrafted with the new land designations and easily passed the state legislature as Public Act 175 on June 4, 1903.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Minutes, April 8, 1903," Box 1, Folder 2, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM. Palmer was a long-time opponent of reforestation in Crawford County. He had opposed the findings of the State Board of Agriculture in 1894 that the barrens were useless for agriculture. He expressed his complaints in letters to the press around the state and some newspapers backed his findings; "Those Pine Barrens," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, May 22, 1894 and May 23, 1894, nineteenth century binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB; Earle B. Bolton (R-Gaylord), the representative of the region in question, did not agree with the complaints of his constituents. Though he delivered their protest petition and expressed their objections to the reserve, his observations led him to conclude that the barrens would not be agriculturally profitable. "By Two New Bills," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, January 19, 1903, 1900 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB.

⁵⁹ The commission proposed that the following land be included in the reservation: E½ of Township 22 North, Range 2 West; E½ of Township 22 North, Range 3 West; Township 21 North, Range 3 West; Township 21 North, Range 4 West; S½ of Township 25 North, Range 4 West. The citizens' group countered with Township 21 North, Range 3 West; Township 21 North, Range 4 West; N½ of Township 24 North, Range 4 West; S½ of Township 25 North, Range 4 West. These lots are on the north side of Higgins Lake in north-central Michigan.

⁶⁰ "Minutes, April 8, 1903," Box 1, Folder 2, Minutes of the Michigan State Forestry Commission, Department of Conservation, SAM. The boundaries proposed by the citizens were the ones adopted. It is important to note that the whole reserve was not contiguous. The two southern townships formed one part of the reserve, while the two half townships in the northern part were separate. These two areas were managed differently by the commission throughout the decade. For a brief recounting of this

According to the commission's reports, the citizens' group was true to its word, and local residents subsequently supported the reservation thoroughly. Garfield attributed this support to residents' increased understanding of the MFC's work, as well as increased land values resulting from the work done to curb the threat of wildfires in and around the reserve. The MFC also employed several local citizens in forestry work. However, resistance was still latent throughout the region, as some residents feared that the commission sought to convert their part of the state into a "howling wilderness." Despite these concerns, opposition was limited to grumbling in the community and there was no active protest. Farmers and businessmen who used local rivers to ship their goods supported the MFC. Soil erosion declined from the work on the headwaters, which meant that harbor communities needed to dredge less fill from their harbors and thus saved them money. Hence, within a few years scientists noticed the benefits of reforestation both locally and regionally throughout the state.⁶¹

The Michigan Forestry Association (MFA)

Garfield had not anticipated the depth of local resistance to reforestation. Despite this oversight, he and his colleagues had capably negotiated a compromise to establish the forest reserve. However, Garfield recognized that he needed a bulwark against criticism that public forests were a government assault on private property and agriculture. In response, he formed the Michigan Forestry Association (MFA) in 1905 to support the work of the MFC through a coalition of pro-reforestation groups and individuals. Like many progressive organizations, the MFA relied on volunteerism and coordinated political and public efforts to solve problems. It pressed politicians to back the MFC's recommendations and engaged in a broad educational drive to win public support for forestry initiatives. Furthermore, the group was affiliated with the American Forestry Association, which shared these goals and functioned on a national level. This connection expanded

opposition from Crawford and Roscommon counties and its resolution, see Botti and Moore, *Michigan's State Forests*, 5-9.

⁶¹ Charles W. Garfield, Arthur Hill, and Edwin A. Wildey, "Official Report to the Governor," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1903-1904* (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Co., 1904), 16-20. None of the locals employed to work on the reserve had been on the citizen's committee, so it does not appear that they received any political favors from the MFC for their compromise on the reserve. For information on continued opposition see Frank M. Sparks, "Are Against Reforestation," *Grand Rapids Herald*, September 5, 1905, 1905 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB.

education on forestry matters related to Michigan while tapping into greater political clout and authority.⁶²

Though Garfield went to great lengths to distinguish the MFA from his work on the MFC, he clearly was involved in its creation. The association's first meeting took place at Park Congregational Church and Ryerson Library in Grand Rapids September 29-30, 1905. Garfield was an elder at the church, which is next to the library, so arrangements for the gathering were clearly made on his behalf. He did not hold any official capacity in the MFA during his tenure with the MFC, and MFA reports hardly mention him. In fact, Garfield distanced himself so much from the association that early reports credited Thornton Green of Ontonagon as the founder. Garfield did use MFC publications to advertise the MFA's growth and programs. For instance, the MFC educational pamphlet "The Advance Movement in Michigan Forestry" summarized the first meetings of the new MFA.⁶³

Progressives broadly supported the MFA, and it drew eight hundred initial members in the first year. The first meeting in Grand Rapids provided an opportunity for people from various interest groups to speak on why forestry was a concern for them. William Beal from MAC spoke about the botanical concerns raised by the forest problem. George Horton of the Grange, a fraternal organization of farmers, asserted that farmers needed trees and forests to protect their crops and to provide them with materials and fuel. Mrs. Francis King of Alma, who represented the several chapters of Michigan Federation of Women's Clubs that had prominent forestry committees, stated that trees made communities beautiful and revived the fortunes of former lumber towns. Filibert Roth from UM commented on forestry management, while J.S. Porter of Saginaw conveyed the concerns of lumbermen. The speeches helped unite these citizens, who came with a wide range of interests, in the cause of reforestation.⁶⁴

The main topics discussed by MFA members were consistent with the goals of Garfield, the MFC, and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

⁶² Garfield, "The Present Outlook for the Forestry Movement," 51-52, "To Save Forests," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, July 15, 1905, "Care of Forests" and "Appeals to All of Us," *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, August 28, 1905, 1900 binder, Michigan Reforestation clippings file, CB.

⁶³ Michigan Forestry Commission, *The Advance Movement in Michigan Forestry* (Lansing: Michigan State Forestry Commission, 1905), 1-14. The same material can be found in "The Michigan Forestry Association Initial Meeting," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1905-06*, 108-125.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5; Garfield, "The Present Outlook for the Forestry Movement," 51.

Speakers also taught members how to discuss these issues with friends and neighbors, and how to dispel myths about the potential negative effects of reforestation on the state and their communities. The new State Land Commissioner, William Rose, addressed anxieties that permanent state-owned forests would undermine the tax base. He encouraged citizens to understand that these lands were sites of ongoing tax reversion and the state rarely collected taxes on them. Rose urged members to tell their communities that these stands of trees would stimulate employment and provide economic opportunities more productive for long-term growth than the cycle of tax reversion.⁶⁵

However, most of the MFA's discussion regarding taxes focused on how the current tax structure discouraged and limited conservation. When determining the tax value of a property, assessors considered the stumpage value of trees and not just the land. Taxing growing trees along with the land vastly increased tax bills and encouraged owners to cut marketable trees in order to avoid additional yearly taxes on them. Engineer John Hubbell of Manistee observed how this method of assessing property taxes effectively prevented private owners from planting trees. He instead proposed that the state tax trees as a commodity, not property. Thus owners would not pay annual taxes on growing trees but only once after harvesting them. This change would prompt landowners interested in commercial forestry to replant, or at least encourage natural regeneration, because the growth of new forests would cost them pennies compared to the current tax code. This problem in the state tax code was one of many, and none of the numerous proposals for comprehensive tax reform had yet gained majority support in the legislature. Taxation remained a central debate of interest to farmers, foresters, and reformers over the next two decades.⁶⁶

MFA members also elected the association's first board of directors and officers at the 1905 conference: John Bissell of Detroit was named president, Thornton Green vice-president, T.W. Sawyer of Ludington secretary, and John Hubbell treasurer. Primarily composed of lumbermen, farmers, and businessmen, the board also included George Horton of Fruit Ridge, Lucius Hubbard of Houghton, Mrs. Francis King of Alma, Henry N. Loud of Au Sable, Charles Monroe of South Haven, and Walter Winchester of Grand Rapids. Many of these individuals had attended forestry events locally or nationally. While the officers and board represented the range of groups interested in

⁶⁵ MFC, "The Advance Movement in Michigan Forestry," 6-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-11.

reforestation, most hailed from western Michigan. Only Bissell lived in the heavily populated and industrial southeast part of the state, and no members resided in Lansing, the state's capital. While this distribution fostered dialogue in rural communities interested in land use questions, it did not maximize connections to the state's economic and political centers, which ultimately limited the MFA's impact.⁶⁷

Moreover, despite the diverse coalition that supported the reforestation movement, educational elites and upper-class progressives comprised the MFA. The association was also divided between members who were fixated on what had been lost during the lumber era and those who looked forward to the possibilities of reforestation in the future. They expressed their ideas in scientific and quantitative terms, but also in literary and abstract ones. Their views of nature ranged from the practical and economical to the idealized and pastoral. These progressive, yet anti-modern, sentiments reflected the complex and ambiguous tendencies of elites during the period. The MFA's lack of a clear vision and stunted connections to seats of economic and political power stalled the association over the next decade.

The Legacy of the Michigan Forestry Commission (MFC)

The state's first forest reserve near Higgins Lake was the primary manifestation of the MFC's work. The larger legacy was that the commission made conservation and land use policy a responsibility of the state. Prior to the establishment of the MFC, Michigan was limited to a protectionist stance when it came to the conservation of resources. The state had game laws in place to limit hunting and fishing, but its most active work was in fish hatcheries. The majority of citizens rarely encountered these fish, but the impact of the MFC and MFA were more noticeable. State officials set aside land as reserves, planted trees along roadsides and in cities, and rehabilitated wastelands. Another important development was a decrease in smoke. MFC fire prevention policies limited wildfires on actively managed lands and made them uncommon. Unfortunately, due to cost prohibitions, the fire warden had a small staff who worked on the forest reserve. Yet many citizens noticed these changes, which helped launch other forms of progressive conservation legislation.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁸ Filibert Roth, "Biennial Report of the Forest Warden" and "Great Lakes Forestry Conference," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1907-08*, 16-32, 60-62; Eugene T. Peterson, "The History of Wild Life Conservation in Michigan, 1859-1921" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1953), 132-167.

Michigan's forestry commissioners were aware that their work reflected the changing role of the state in the new century. In the preface to the MFC's 1904 report, they wrote, "In our endeavor to stay the ruthless destruction of timber and awaken an interest in tree-planting as a commercial venture for the State, we are entering upon a new era of statecraft." Yet they understood this new state function as an enhancement of free enterprise, and not a restriction of it, because the state stimulated economic activity and maintained natural resources for the common good. The preface continued:

Our commission has set itself about the work of impressing people with the importance of growing timber as an accessory to our agriculture, and one which shall, if well carried out, furnish a regular and continuous product from the soil, of great and increasing value. In doing this, the grower of timber will serve his State by supporting numberless commercial enterprises which use for raw material the products of the forest. In accomplishing this purpose, any effort of the State expressed in well defined methods will reap a reward not second to any other effort along the lines of production. The statistical matter furnished in many of the papers which are contributed to this volume furnish an unanswerable argument in favor of holding permanently in this State large areas of land to be kept as forest reserve lands.⁶⁹

From the perspective of the commissioners, the forest reserves served the joint purposes of stabilizing failed lands and stimulating economic growth through the production of raw materials for use in the developing industrial sector.

The MFC obviously sought to expand this work every year, yet the legislature slowed the commission's activities with small appropriations. The commissioners annually sought increased funding and authorization to address cutover lands and replant areas under their control, requests for increases that the legislature routinely denied. Despite the MFC's success in terms of conservation, the legislature remained leery of expanding state control over land in the form of permanent forest reserves. Most citizens still believed that nearly all land in the state, reforested or not, should be held in private hands, and elected representatives reflected that perspective. The push for expanded

⁶⁹ "Prefatory Note," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1903-04*, 9.

conservation work by the state stagnated and stalled without the influx of more money to support the vision held by reforestation advocates. These conservationists published their plans in reports, pamphlets, and newspapers, but without the means to implement them much of the work was unfinished. Reliably, fires continued to sweep across the state, since fire prevention efforts were poor and inadequately funded.⁷⁰

The MFC's final reports presented conflicting perspectives of progress and frustration. Garfield insisted that farmers, lumbermen, manufacturers, educators, politicians, merchants, and the clergy had changed their minds regarding forestry. He recognized the Michigan State Federation of Women's Clubs as the movement's strongest ally because of their range of conservation activities in communities throughout the state. He claimed residents and citizens were steadily recognizing the importance of forestry.⁷¹ Yet regardless of Garfield's hopeful assessment of the future of reforestation, Michigan's brief flirtation with the policy was nearing an end. By 1907, powerful politicians were busy at work remaking conservation in the state, shifting control from the "experts" to machine politicians. The elimination of the MFC that year, and the creation of a new patronage-rich bureaucracy in its place, signaled a departure from progressive conservation and, indirectly, a renewal of agricultural boosterism in Michigan. The new Public Domain Commission held contradictory mandates both to settle the cutover and to manage the natural resources on it. The forest reserves grew in the next decade under the direction of forester Marcus Schaaf, but the lack of consistent and uniform policies from commissioners divided—rather than unified—groups and individuals interested in land use in the cutover.⁷²

Despite drifting away from progressive politics, reforestation remained an important part of Michigan's future. President Theodore Roosevelt created the Michigan National Forest as the state's first national forest in February 1909, uniting remaining public domain lands

⁷⁰ Charles W. Garfield, Arthur Hill, and Edwin A. Wildey, "Official Report to the Governor," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1902*, 11-13; Hill, "The Greatest Enemy of the Forest Reserve – Fire," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1903-04*, 43-44; Filibert Roth, "Biennial Report of the Forest Warden," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1905-06*, 19-32.

⁷¹ Charles W. Garfield, "Forward" and "Two Years of Progress," *Annual Report of the Michigan Forestry Commission, 1907-08*, 11-13, 33-36.

⁷² For more information on how forest reserves and reforestation were not a priority of the Public Domain Commission, see Joseph J. Jones, "The Making of a National Forest: The Contest over the West Michigan Cutover, 1888-1943" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2007), 137-188.

in the northeastern Lower Peninsula and the eastern Upper Peninsula. The state forest reserves slowly expanded over the next twenty-five years into Michigan's State Forests. Over that same period, fire and game wardens increased efforts to control wildfires and manage fish and game. However, the MFC's most important legacies were less tangible. Garfield's mediation of the opposition to the Higgins Lake Forest Reserve via compromise served as a public policy model for decades in the state. Similarly, the commission was the manifestation of a broad coalition of conservationists composed of progressives of every stripe. This fact prevented citizens from viewing conservation as a state-sanctioned imposition by elites on local communities. Rather, reforestation and agriculture became competing land use visions for the cutover, each of which had supporters at every level of government, business, and society. The movement had evaded the accusation of elitism that was common from opponents of progressive reforms. This diverse support amidst diffused opposition provided the context in which Michigan became a leader in innovative reforestation policies during the 1920s and 1930s.⁷³

⁷³ See Jones, "The Making of a National Forest," 189-331 for a discussion of how scientific research, automobile tourism, and economic crisis spurred the designation of public lands and tree planting on public lands by federal, state, and local government bodies in the 1920s and 1930s.