**The Civilian Conservation Corps and Michigan**

**Economics**

**Mr. Moran/Mr. Gallagher**

***“Our greatest task is to put people to work. This is no unsolveable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our national resources.”***

**—Franklin D. Roosevelt  
4 March 1933**

**The Civilian Conservation Corps was President Franklin Roosevelt's personal creation. In his July 1932 Democratic Party presidential nomination acceptance speech, he had proposed employing a million men in forest work across the nation.**

**The proposed civilian conservation corps would recruit 250,000 unemployed young men to work on federal and state owned land for "the prevention of forest fires, floods, and soil erosion, plant, pest and disease control." In a message to Congress, Roosevelt declared that the CCC would "conserve our precious national resources" and "pay dividends to the present and future generations." "More important," he added, "we can take a vast army of the unemployed out into healthful surroundings.**

**On 31 March 1933, Roosevelt signed the bill into law, and six days later he ordered the formation of the CCC. His goal was to have 250,000 men in the forest in three months.**

**The Civilian Conservation Corps administration consisted of a director, Robert Fechner, and an advisory board of representatives from the Departments of War, Agriculture, Interior and Labor. With the help of local boards, the Department of Labor selected the CCC enrollees. The War Department housed, clothed and fed the men, and organized and administered the camps. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior planned the work projects, recommended camp locations and supervised the work programs.**

**One often overlooked aspect of the birth of the CCC was the contribution of Michigan Senator James Couzens. On 23 January 1933 the Republican introduced a bill authorizing the U.S. Army to house, feed and clothe unemployed, single males. Couzens proposed that the army care for up to 300,000 needy men on its military bases. Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley urged that "the aims of the bill could be better and more economically accomplished by localizing the problem in our cities, where a large majority of these young men are now found," and Couzens' bill was shelved. Nevertheless, the bill introduced the concept of army assistance with relief schemes.**

**On 17 April 1933 the nation's first CCC camp, Camp Roosevelt, opened in the George Washington National Forest in Virginia. By 1 July 1933 the goal of enlisting a quarter million enrollees, in over 1,300 camps, had been accomplished. At that time, it was the fastest large-scale mobilization of men (including World War I) in U.S. history.**

**In Michigan several factors speeded CCC organization. The hasty mobilization of the CCC had caught private industry unprepared, and manufacturers were swamped with demands for axes, hoes and shovels. In Michigan, however, the forestry schools at Michigan State College and the University of Michigan lent tools to get the state's first CCC camps going.**

**Many of the CCC enrollees in Michigan were natives of the state and did not have as far to travel as did the enrollees from the urban areas of the East who served in the Far West. If chosen, a candidate enrolled for six months and agreed to send at least $22 of his $30 monthly wage home to his dependants.**

**Approximately ten percent of CCC enrollees were unemployed war veterans. They formed separate companies; in Michigan there were at least five veterans' camps. Michigan veterans were also kept on the active list for state employment vacancies. Besides performing various forest duties, veterans in the CCC served communities near their camps as color guards and firing squads at funerals and on other occasions.**

**Believing that CCC enrollees could become "better and more employable citizens" through training and education, President Roosevelt called for a nationwide, Washington-directed CCC education program in late 1933 to replace local camp efforts. The new program added an educational advisor, usually an unemployed male teacher, to each camp. The advisor, the company commander and the camp's technical service people tried to offer a comprehensive educational program. Classes, held at night to avoid interfering with work projects, included academic, vocational and job training, as well as health, first aid and lifesaving. Attendance was voluntary.**

**In 1937 the CCC began requiring that enrollees spend ten hours a week taking academic or vocational training classes. Vocational subjects ranged from automotive mechanics and carpentry to drafting and cooking. Proficiency certificates were awarded upon completion of a course. Michigan officials reported that the average CCC camp provided work experience and supplemental training in "at least 30 different civilian payroll jobs."**

**Michigan CCC members could also take high-school and college-freshmen correspondence courses through the University of Michigan. By late 1936 correspondence study centers with supervisors were operating in at least twenty-seven Lower Peninsula CCC camps. The men paid fifty cents for each course plus the cost of textbooks. As of November 1936, over one thousand CCC enrollees in both the Upper and Lower peninsulas had participated in high-school correspondence classes, and at least 144 were taking college courses in the Lower Peninsula.**

**Nationally, 90 percent of all CCC enrollees took classes. Over 100,000 men were taught to read and write. Over 25,000 received eighth-grade diplomas, and 5,000 earned high-school diplomas. During its later years, the CCC annually produced 45,000 truck drivers, 7,500 bridge builders and 1,500 welders.**

**Each camp spent an estimated $5,000 per month in the local market to buy food stuffs and supplies.**

**The benefits of the CCC extended well beyond the camps' immediate localities. By the end of its first eighteen months, the Michigan CCC was sending $112,000 monthly to 4,500 families.**

**Total CCC expenditures in Michigan reached $95 million, and enrollees sent over $20 million to their dependants.**

**For more detailed information go to: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463\_18670\_18793-53515--,00.html**