

Red Lake Wildlife Management Area
Headquarters, Norris Camp
11536 Faunce Butterfield Forest Road
Roosevelt, MN 56673
(218) 783-6861
email: redlake.wildlife@state.mn.us



FISH AND WILDLIFE
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040
888-646-6367 or 651-296-6157
mndnr.gov

The Minnesota DNR prohibits discrimination in its programs and services based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital or familial status, disability, public assistance status, age, sexual orientation, and local human rights commission activity. Individuals with a disability who need a reasonable accommodation to access or participate in DNR programs and services please contact the DNR ADA Title II Coordinator at info.dnr@state.mn.us, 651-296-6157. For TTY/TDD communication contact us through the Minnesota Relay Service at 711 or 800-627-3529. Discrimination inquiries should be sent to Minnesota DNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4049.

This document is available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities by contacting info.dnr@state.mn.us, 651-296-6157. For TTY/TDD communication contact us through the Minnesota Relay Service at 711 or 800-627-3529.

©2020, State of Minnesota,
Department of Natural Resources



Printed on recycled paper containing 30 percent
post-consumer waste.

FAW_0595_20

Life After Norris Camp

Some of the workers at Norris Camp went on to accomplish great things after they left the WPA and RA programs. One man, Otto Wagner, who was unable to get a position as a camp timekeeper because he didn't have a high school diploma, went on to earn his diploma, as well as a degree in law. He worked with the State Department in various capacities and eventually became a Consul for the United States in Mexico, Hong Kong, Australia, Ecuador, and the Philippines.

An Era of Change

World War II began, the WPA and RA programs shut down, and Norris Camp operations transferred to the State Department of Conservation. A shooting range

was built and State Game Wardens came to receive training in law enforcement techniques. Norris Camp also housed several federal fire-fighting crews during the hot spring and summer of 1977.

Norris Camp has been the headquarters for the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area since 1935. The Red Lake WMA, known earlier as the Red Lake Game Refuge, was established in 1932. Many research projects, habitat improvement projects, and population surveys have been and continue to be completed there, including prescribed burning to improve deer and sharp-tailed grouse habitat, an attempt to reintroduce woodland caribou, and forest management planning to provide habitat for a wide-range of wildlife species.



Norris Camp, 1954

The History of Norris Camp

Red Lake Wildlife Management Area



Preparing pondweed tubers for waterfowl planting.



Norris Camp (named for the township in which it is located) has a rich history that spans close to a century. It has employed and housed over 1,000 people and is one of the last Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Resettlement Administration (RA) camps in the nation in operational condition. Norris Camp is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The CCC and the Works Progress Administration

The history of Norris Camp began during the Great Depression in 1933 with President Roosevelt's New Deal programs. One of these programs, the Civilian Conservation Corps or CCC, was the reason Norris Camp was created. The CCC helped spur the United States' economy out of the Great Depression by hiring unemployed young men for public conservation work. Close to 200 men and officers were stationed at Norris Camp. The CCC performed a variety of tasks and completed many valuable projects that otherwise would have been left undone.

Work at the camp was hard. CCC workers usually put in ten to twelve hour days. They were involved in labor-intensive work such as planting trees, constructing ranger station buildings, setting up an emergency telephone system, and conducting wildlife and vegetation surveys. They also had a timber-milling operation. Due to unstable political and economic conditions, the CCC program was replaced after only a year by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Resettlement Administration (RA).



Woodland caribou.



Sphagnum moss was harvested to feed the woodland caribou during the winter.



Wildlife crews erected woodland caribou fences, enclosing 2,300 acres to hold animals until they were acclimated to this region. October 1938.



Innovative, but labor intensive, methods were used to drive piles for this dam. 1936.

The WPA was developed to establish jobs and to construct projects of lasting value and, like the CCC, it offered jobs to unemployed men. RA work projects were designed to rehabilitate land left by settlers who were relocated out of the area.

The Resettlement Administration

Poor farming soils prevented many settlers from making a living from farming. Many became tax delinquent, so the Federal government offered to purchase the land and relocate the settlers to an area better suited for farming. Some homesteaders felt pressured into moving because the government closed schools and discontinued road maintenance, while others saw it as an opportunity for improvement.

RA workers removed buildings and filled in wells, planted trees, built dams, and relocated wildlife to areas with better habitat. They built many of the lookout towers and recreational areas throughout the county and improved many roads and trails. They also built several satellite camps that served as work stations for field workers.

Life at Norris Camp

Life for many workers included few luxuries. The laborers were given room and board plus about \$45 a month; \$40 of this had to be sent home to help out their families. Specialists and other positions of responsibility received larger stipends.

A member of an RA wildlife crew described life in a temporary work camp: "...It consisted of a large, double walled tent, a barrel stove heater, a wood cook stove, straw ticks, and lots of wool blankets, pots, pans, and eating utensils. We constructed one large common bunk out of logs and spruce boughs. Many nights it got down to 40 below zero. ...At night we had to let the fire die down to avoid sparks from setting our tent on fire. Our many thicknesses of wool blankets felt real good then."