

Wisconsin Governor Outlines Broad And Progressive Recreation Program

by Felix Streyckmans

"ACTION TO CONSERVE natural outdoor recreational resources is more urgent and vital than solving the problems of the aged, juvenile delinquency, broadened medical care or the national highway building program," Governor Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin declared before delegates to the Wisconsin division, IWLA, convention. "All these matters are urgent but they still can be solved later. In resource conservation, it's now or never. If we wait until later, the resources we are trying to save will be gone."

Delegates to the convention heartily approved all his expressed views on conservation which covered a wide field. Obviously one of the best informed outdoor enthusiasts in high government office today, Governor Nelson also appeared to be completely disinterested in taking the safe side of a controversial issue. He opposed ruining scenic highways with billboards, stating that something had to be done to prevent creation of a network of what he called "billboard alleys" all over the state. He also advocated strict zoning of motor boat use, adding, "I cannot understand why the boat manufacturers oppose so many of the restrictions that are necessary to prevent destruction of the recreation resource that makes their industry possible."

Wisconsin being a state of many lakes, he was outspoken in his desire to preserve their usefulness by intelligent restriction in spite of what he called "overpressuring" to force boats of all sizes and types on all waters. He recommended zoning the waters and stated that this is no more a detriment to boat operations than prohibiting drag races on a main street curtails the use of automobiles. "And we don't permit industry in residential areas, yet no one claims we are trying to hinder industry," he declared.

He called attention to studies being conducted for him by C. W. Threinen, administrative assistant of the Wisconsin Conservation department, whose article, "Conflict Won't Win on Water," appears on page 6 of this issue.

He was just as eager to restrict the

building of cottages and resorts on recreational lakes, stating, "One man can build a cottage on a lake, clear the land in front of him, build a boat dock and still get a fine view. But when several do it, each detracts from the view of the other. Finally, when the entire shore is built up, docked and cleared, the scenic attraction that brought the owners to the lake no longer exists. There is no ques-



Photo by The Sheboygan Press

Wisconsin division president Fred Stamm presents Governor Nelson with a citation

tion that we must take regulatory steps to prevent this from happening to all our lakes."

The governor is sponsoring a large financial program to acquire recreational areas before they become industrialized or privately owned, but he said it was his opinion that zoning is even more important than acquisition in maintaining the state's reputation as a scenic and recreational attraction. While advocating acquisition of land to permit the public to use it, he pointed out that only a small percentage of area can be acquired by the people. His main objective is to maintain as broad a recreational environment as possible and to do this he insisted that restrictions to prevent property owners from destroying scenic qualities of the lake were in the long term public interest.

"I have a great deal of respect for the rights of property owners," he said,

but we apparently need laws to prevent them from using their rights to destroy the value of other property and even, in the long run, of their own."

"There are many legitimate uses for stream banks," he said, "but the streams themselves can stand only so much use or they will become valueless for all. A few privately owned homes or resorts along a stream can bring scenic and recreational enjoyment to a certain number of people, but when the entire stream bank is built up, nobody benefits. Streams and rivers can stand a certain amount of industrial use, but when that, too, becomes excessive, the value of the public water for all of industry is destroyed. Therefore I advocate limiting the number and frequency of water bank uses by means of intelligent zoning."

He indicated that much study would have to be devoted to arriving at equitable rules for denying certain rights to property owners, but that, if fair, they would make all water-side more valuable and useful than continuing to permit the present status of overuse and eventual ruin.

He recommended the purchase by the state of easements on privately owned property as another way to control and curtail destructive use of the land. Land along a stream, for example, remains in the hands of private owners but, for a nominal sum, they agree not to cut the trees, build any more structures or in other specified ways alter the appearance of the land and may not sell the land without requiring the same restrictions. Wisconsin has already obtained scenic easements along fifty miles of highways overlooking the Mississippi river for an average cost of less than \$700 a mile.

Without trying to place the blame on any one segment of society, he said that education has failed to create the right attitude toward appreciation of the value of resources. His remarks along this line were exceptionally well received by the convention in the light of the division's current emphasis on youth training to correct this condition.

Crediting the League with having more members genuinely interested in the broad principles of conservation than any other organization he knew of, he expressed his regret that others with selfish motives made their voices more strongly heard in legislative halls. He declared that legislation is passed most frequently to please those who talk the loudest and added that League people did not talk loud enough.