



The Civilian Conservation Corps: A Legacy Lives On In New Jersey's State Parks

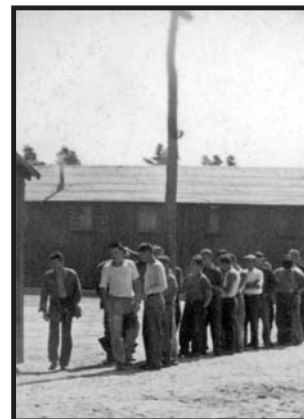
Have you ever wondered how a park came to be a park? Parks are a wonderful community resource that we use for relaxation, picnics and other forms of recreation. Although parks have been a fundamental part of New Jersey's landscape for several generations, this has not always been the case.

The practice of holding large expanses of land in the public trust for parks began in the 19th century. In New Jersey, it wasn't until 1903 that the state established its first Historic Site at the Indian King Tavern in Haddonfield. Our first State Forest, Bass River, was established in 1905 and our first State Park, Swartswood, was established in 1914. From then until the 1930s only a handful of other parks were established.

Then, during the Great Depression, park expansion took place in many states. This was due to a Federal work program known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was one of several programs established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under the New Deal to "prime the pump" of the nation's economy.

On March 21, 1933, President Roosevelt gave his "Three Essentials for Unemployment Relief" speech before Congress. In it he said, "I propose to create a civilian conservation corps to be used in simple work not interfering with normal employment, and confining itself to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control and similar projects. I call your attention to the fact that this type of work is of definite, practical value, not only through the prevention of great present financial loss, but also as a means of creating future national wealth." It became one of the most popular programs of the New Deal.

Most of the enrollees in the CCC were young men between the ages of 18 and 25. They came to be known as the CCC boys. Many were recruited from the local welfare boards and often came from families where the father was unemployed. The enrollment period was for six months, although they could re-enlist for several six-month stints up to two years.



Left: A group photo of CCC boys from Bass River State Forest. Right: CCC boys wait in line for dinner at a camp in New Jersey. (photos taken by John Nisky, a CCC enrollee - circa 1937)

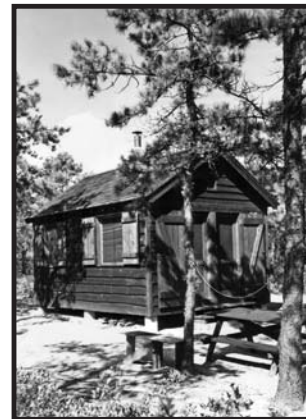


The Civilian Conservation Corps: A Legacy Lives On In New Jersey's State Parks *(cont.)*

The CCC observed the eight-hour day and the five-day work week. This schedule left plenty of time to participate in recreational and educational services which were also provided at the camps. Participants earned \$30 each month. They could keep \$5 while the remaining \$25 was sent home to support their families. Using the Consumer Price Index that \$30 in 1933 was equal to \$466 in 2006. The enrollees also received room, board and medical care.

President Roosevelt was interested in preserving the nation's natural resources and focused the CCC on conservation. The CCC built roads, bridges, picnic shelters and trails throughout the country. They participated in soil erosion control, planted acres of trees and established forest management practices.

In New Jersey, the CCC helped establish and improve many of our state parks and forests, among them are Bass River State Forest in Tuckerton, Belleplain State Forest in Woodbine, Brendan T. Byrne State Forest in New Lisbon, Cheesequake State Park in Matawan, Hacklebarney State Park in Long Valley, High Point State Park in Sussex, Jenny Jump State Forest in Hope, Penn State Forest in New Gretna, Parvin State Park in Pittsgrove, Ringwood State Park in Ringwood, Stephens State Park in Hackettstown, Stokes State Forest in Branchville and Voorhees State Park in Glen Gardner.



Among the projects conducted by the CCC in New Jersey's state parks and forests, was Lake Absegami in Bass River State Forest as well as the shelters still used by campers today. (photos courtesy of the State Park Service)

The areas where the camps were established received many benefits. While the camps were in session, locals were hired as "Local Experienced Men" who helped train the CCC enrollees. Much of the supplies and food for the camps was purchased locally which further stimulated the economy.

After the CCC was disbanded in the early 1940s, the state parks and forests grew in size and in number. They are now a part of what makes New Jersey a wonderful place to live. This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the CCC and their legacy lives on throughout New Jersey. Take time to visit your local state park or forest and reflect on all that the CCC has done for New Jersey's natural environment. For more information on New Jersey's State Parks and Forests, visit www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/