

Appendix H: Collier Agreement

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Collier Agreement

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June 4, 1939

Mr. John Collier, Commissioner,
Bureau of Indian Affairs,
Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.

Attention: Mr. Ward Shepard.

Dear Sir:

Subject: Cooperative solution of the conflict between the interests of the Indian Service and the Bureau of Biological Survey in the Egg Lake region of Becker County, Minnesota, with reference to their respective projects.

As agreed at the informal conference in Mr. Shepard's office between Mr. Shepard and Mr. Burns of the Indian Service and Mr. Salyer and Mr. Dieffenbach of the Biological Survey, I am presenting herewith the basis for a cooperative agreement to the interests of both parties in the development of their respective projects which overlap in one instance.

There is attached an outline map of Becker County upon which has been indicated in red the boundaries of the White Earth Indian Reservation. In green are shown the maximum boundaries of the area in which the Biological Survey is interested in developing as a migratory waterfowl sanctuary; the lands colored yellow are the lands in which the State Conservation Department of Minnesota is interested in maintaining as a State forest and which they prescribed to the Indian Service but relinquish to the Biological Survey inasmuch as the Survey has agreed to permit them to extend their reforestation operations onto these lands when they are acquired by the Biological Survey.

On this same map, the lands of J. E. Hamilton, which form the nucleus of our proposed project in the north, are outlined in blue. Mr. Hamilton has indicated that he will relinquish these lands to the survey only, because the Survey will continue the area as a wildlife refuge, which constitutes Mr. Hamilton's original interest in the property.

The area shaded pink on the same map shows the extent of the area already optioned by the Indian Service and on which the

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Biological Survey wishes to secure a release from the Indian Service in order to develop the project to its greatest scientific capacity for migratory waterfowl which development, incidentally, will also be of the greatest benefit to the resident Indians of the vicinity.

From the standpoint of the Biological Survey, the proposed project forms a very definite link in the series of migratory waterfowl refuges being established by the Biological Survey throughout the great flight lane known as the Mississippi Flyway. Tracts suitable for such refuges are not readily found because of the need for adequate food and dependable water supply.

No one, we believe, will question the outstanding value of the Egg Lake region from that standpoint.

In order to properly develop the lakes and establish ideal conditions suitable for migratory birds, it is necessary that the Biological Survey control the Egg Lake River Valley. It is planned to construct some small dams stabilizing the water in the many lakes of the area and thus insure better growing conditions, especially for the wild rice. The Indian Service is mainly interested in this same area in view of the excellent rice bed found on Little Rice Lake.

In the aforementioned conference, it was the thought of Mr. Shepard and Mr. Burns that the Indian Service could well afford to release their options in this area to the Biological Survey, in return for the specific privileges to be granted to the Indians of this agency by the Biological Survey and herewith enumerated:

1. That the Indians be given priority in ricing privileges not only in the area where the interests of the two agencies overlap, but also on the much greater area which the Biological Survey is taking over in this region; namely, Flat Lake, Tamarac Lake, Pine Lake, Big Rice Lake, Height of Land Lake, Black Bird Lake, and smaller lakes too numerous to mention.

2. The Biological Survey further agrees to give the resident Indians of the agency priority in the matter of trapping rights in its entire project. The Biological Survey reserves the right at all times to preserve a minimum breeding stock of fur-bearing animals on the area. It is suggested that the Biological Survey set up a number of trapping units over these prolific fur-producing waters, and that the Indian Service assign certain Indian families or groups the right to trap specific units.

3. The Biological Survey further agrees to furnish the Indian Service a series of young Indian men of high character along the most Taharae NWR and WMD / Draft CCP

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modern lines of game management. The Indian Service agrees to pay their salaries, and the Biological Survey will, through its resident biologists on the tract, give them specific practical training along modern game management lines. The philosophy is that these men will be transferred to other Indian projects as soon as they become proficient, and others will take their place.

4. The Biological Survey further agrees to use Indian CCC labor in the development of the project.

5. The Biological Survey further agrees to protect and guarantee to the Indian Service the ricing privileges on the Biological Survey's purchase unit in Aitkin County known as the Rice Lake Migratory Waterfowl Refuge unit. This lake produces annually from 90 to 100 tons of wild rice, and the granting of priority to the Indians for harvesting this will be decidedly to the advantage of this people. At this time, the Biological Survey is engaged in constructing two small dams to stabilize the water levels in this lake, with a view of perpetuating this great rice bed. It is feared that if another year goes by, with the attendant lowering of water levels before the rice matures, this great bed may be permanently and seriously injured.

At present, there exists an arbitrary agreement between the Indian Service and the Minnesota State Conservation Department adopting a boundary line between the two projects separating the eastern halves of the two townships, T142N, Range 39W, and T141N, Range 39W, from the original established civic township governments. The Sugar Bush Township is all but annihilated by the present Indian boundaries. The entrance of the Biological Survey into the picture would permit this area to be closed out entirely. This is most important in view of the fact that the County Boards of both Becker and Mahanomen Counties have made their delinquent tax abatement resolutions dependent upon the Government's buying all of Townships 141N and 142N.

Considered from all angles and the mutual interests of both parties to this agreement, it seems certain that the entrance of the Biological Survey into the picture and the consummation of the Survey migratory waterfowl project here will serve to round out the unfulfilled situations in the whole set-up, and that it is to the mutual advantage of both parties to enter into this agreement.

It is a recognized fact that the harvesting of wild rice by the Indian method does not destroy the annual yield of this rice. The annual yield of this harvest to the Indians of the Egg Lake region will be greatly enhanced not only because all of the water area of the entire refuge unit will become available to

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the Indians for ricing purposes after it has been acquired by the Biological Survey, but also because the engineering development by the Survey will establish permanent water levels which are most beneficial to the natural production of wild rice. Properly-designed dams will also bring into rice production the present rather dry savanna type of meadow valley of the Egg and Otter Tail Rivers.

In the development of the area to its best condition, there will be a continuous demand for Indian labor, and the area will at the same time serve as a training school for Indian game managers. As stated before, the rich fur harvest of this region will be made available to the Indians.

Enclosure.

(Signed) W. C. Henderson
Acting Chief,
Bureau of Biological Survey.

(Signed) John Collier
John Collier, Commissioner,
Bureau of Indian Affairs.

