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ZONING by Counties Promises Means of Rural Improvement

Zoning practices in our larger cities have demonstrated that the best interests of the urban community are benefited thereby. Applications of the same fundamental practices in rural areas should prove of equal value to rural communities, and particularly to those communities where large areas of land are below the margin of successful cultivation as a result of recent changes in economic conditions.

Zoning in urban areas means the districting of available land for various classes of residential and commercial purposes in such a way as to provide the greatest benefits to the community. Zoning of rural areas should result in an economic classification of land for agricultural, forestry, recreational, and other purposes.

In urban areas, authorization for compulsory zoning is established and enforced under the police power. This is not true of rural zoning. Until such enforcement provisions as are desirable for successful rural zoning are established under police power, county boards of supervisors can undertake zoning programs, because they have the necessary authority to go ahead. In Wisconsin, tax-delinquent lands revert to the counties; counties may go into the timber-growing business, they may rearrange town boundary lines, they can discourage settlement and the establishment of schools and highways in submarginal agricultural areas, and they can encourage settlement in the better farming district.

Much Can Be Done by Counties

A study¹³ of land-use problems in northern Wisconsin by the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Wisconsin College of Agriculture, led to the conclusion that, although the best rural zoning program is one that is not hampered by county boundary lines, much can be done by the counties in making a preliminary survey of land resources and basic economic and social factors. These results will be valuable in helping local authorities to deal wisely with their land problems pending the development of a more comprehensive State and Federal land policy.

A first essential of a county zoning program is the appointment of a committee by the county board to study land-use problems facing the board. This committee should be authorized to secure the services of a trained economist to plan and guide the taking of needed data and to complete the final report. The committee should be authorized to employ necessary clerical help and to employ well-informed town officers or old residents in each civil town to gather field data. The fact that local men know the location of farms, who the farmers are, the business of other landowners in the town and the location of the land owned by each, and the location of timbered tracts makes them invaluable cooperators.

County officers familiar with county records can be instructed to obtain tax-delinquency, school, and financial data. By cooperating with local industries the necessary information relative to industrial development in the county may be obtained.

¹³ HIBBARD, B. H., HARTMAN, W. A., and SPARHAWK, W. N. USE AND TAXATION OF LAND IN LINCOLN COUNTY, WISCONSIN. Wis. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bul. 406, 38 p., illus. 1929.

HIBBARD, B. H., SWENHART, J., HARTMAN, W. A., and ALLIN, B. W. TAX DELINQUENCY IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN. Wis. Agr. Expt. Sta. Bul. 390, 28 p., illus. 1928.

Recording of Data Necessary

All field data should be recorded on schedules prepared in such a way as to facilitate transferring results obtained directly to base maps from the schedules. With the exception of certain financial, tax, school, and industrial data, the results of the survey can be pictured on these maps.

An important map used in the Wisconsin study pictured the area, location, and tax-deedable status of nontax-paying lands in the county represented by tax certificates which have not been sold to private parties. (Fig. 218.)

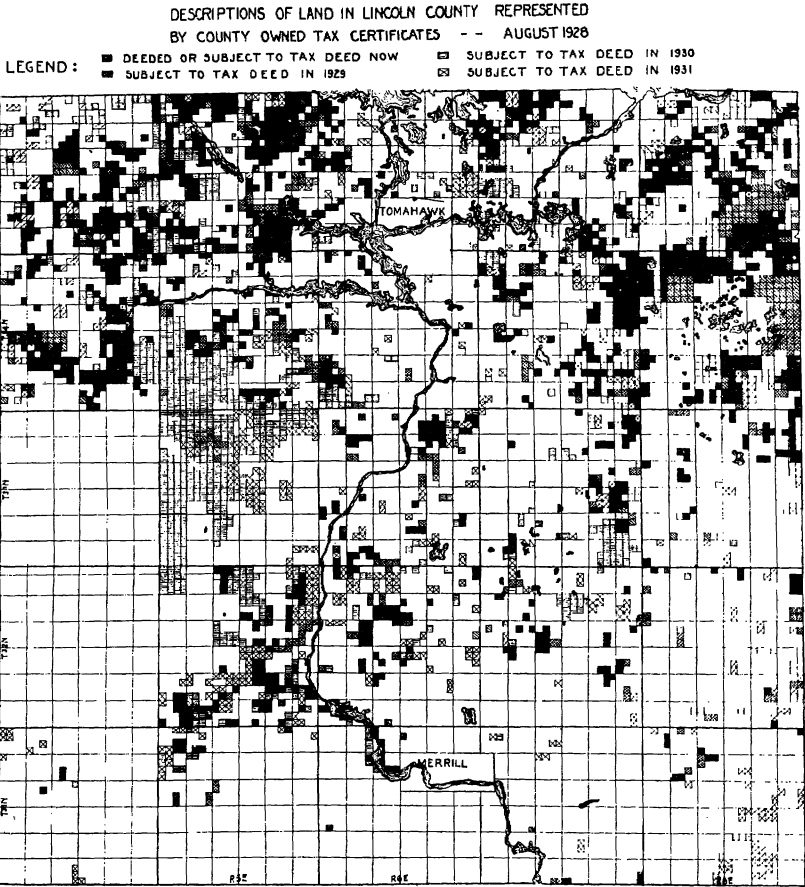


FIGURE 218.—The area of land in Lincoln County, Wis., represented by county-owned tax certificates in August, 1928. In Wisconsin tax certificates are subject to tax deed after the third year. Large areas of nontax-paying lands cripple county and local-civil-town finances, but at the same time place local authorities in strategic position to develop rural zoning programs

A second tax-delinquency map showing the area and location of all tracts of land against which there is one or more unredeemed tax certificate, regardless of ownership, is important because many speculators in tax certificates who are unable to resell are allowing the lands represented thereby to revert to the county, and if the certificates are sold the land usually reverts to the county a year or so later.

A land-not-in-use map shows a potential source of county-owned lands. By the term "land not in use" is meant all abandoned farm

land and all other unplatted lands not covered with a commercial crop of timber, nor included in operated farms, nor used for recreational or industrial purposes. Location of abandoned and operated farms can be pictured on a separate map to indicate the unsuccessful and successful farming areas. The agricultural-marketing centers by types of markets may also be indicated on this map.

LAND IN LINCOLN COUNTY ON WHICH THERE WAS A CROP OF MERCHANTABLE
TIMBER IN 1926-BY PREDOMINANT FOREST COVER TYPE-

LEGEND: ■ VIRGIN HARDWOOD & HEMLOCK ☒ JACK PINE & MIXED PINE
 ■ SECOND GROWTH HARDWOOD & HEMLOCK ☒ SWAMP TIMBER

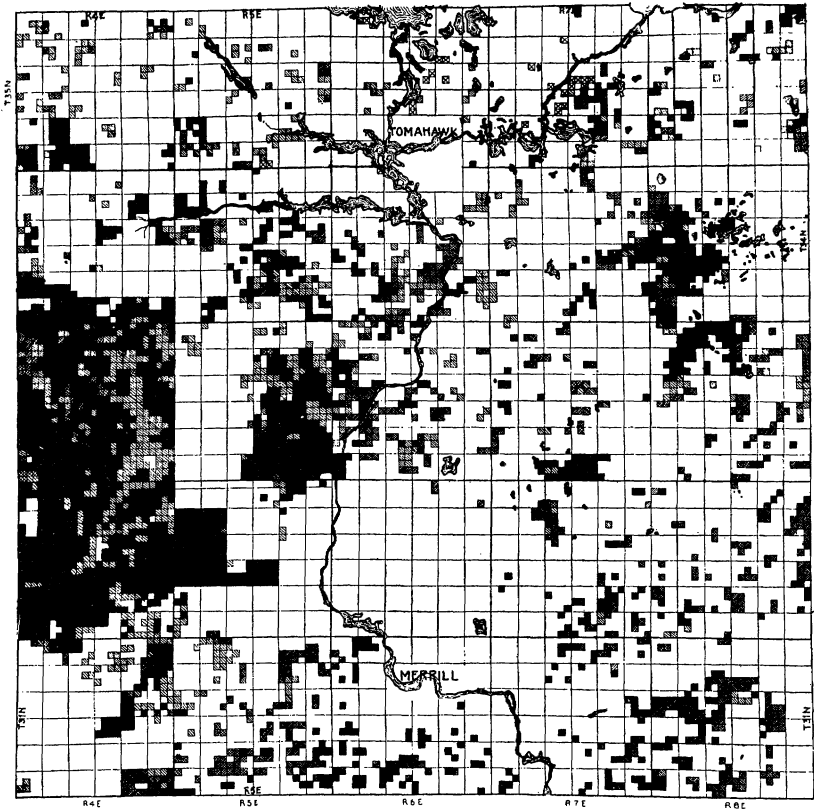


FIGURE 219.—The major part of the land in Lincoln County, Wis., on which there was a crop of merchantable timber in 1926 was in one large block. Many owners of these timbered lands are allowing them to go tax delinquent as soon as the timber is cut. This policy would be changed by a rural zoning program

Land Under Merchantable Timber

An important part of "land in use" to be mapped is land covered by a crop of merchantable timber. This is true (1) because timbered land is a major source of future county-owned land (after the timber has been cut), and (2) because such a map will help determine the degree of importance and practicability for taking steps to block out forest units to supply local industrial needs and the possibility of using certain areas of growing timber as nucleuses for potential forest units. (Fig. 219.)

Ownership and intent of ownership of land can be pictured on a map as the basis for a more intelligent understanding of the practicability of blocking out agricultural, recreational, industrial, and forestry units. Local officials, old residents, and abstractors are in position to record fairly accurate information on these factors.

A soil map and a map picturing other physical characteristics of the land are of utmost importance but are difficult to obtain unless the area has been surveyed. If soil maps are available, the different soil factors can be grouped and mapped as four or five soil types on the basis of their value for the type of agriculture predominating in the district. If no soil survey maps are available, effort should be made to picture the general location of these four or five types of soil.

With such facts as here outlined, in addition to an analysis of county and town finances with particular emphasis on expenditures and source of funds for schools and highways, supplemented by a fair degree of statesmanship and courage, county authorities are in position to take definite action toward the solution of land-use problems.

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