

1961

# Proposed Allagash National Recreation Area

U.S. Department of Interior

National Park Service

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*proposed*

# ALLAGASH

*national recreation area*

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

33.72

158p

BEN MARTIN

JY 17 '61

IN THE HEART OF MAINE'S BACKWOODS the Allagash River flows northward for nearly 100 miles through uplands of unbroken forest. Linking seven major lakes; by turns serene or brawling into rapids, the waterway has been a classic wilderness canoe route since Indians gathered birchbark on its banks.

A region as well as a river, this vast, remote watershed springs from half a hundred lakes and countless streams, and it forms the core of the forest lands that blanket northwestern Maine. These are the legendary great north woods of spruce and fir that once stretched limitlessly into Canada.

Because it is remote, relatively few people know the Allagash country, but these woods and waters, still untamed and reminiscent of the wilderness which once covered the entire eastern part of the United States, have continuing and growing appeal to the canoeist, the naturalist and the sportsman. For the Allagash is a woodsman's world of paddle and portage, of leaping trout and lone-crying loon. Its trails, cut by lumberjacks and trappers, have, since the days when Henry Thoreau tramped them, been followed also by those who seek through simplicity, through hardihood, through intimate contact with nature a respite from civilization and a reaffirmation of life. Thus the Allagash is also a symbol of America's love of the out-of-doors.

This river, this region, this symbol is unique, not only in its characteristics of lake, stream and forest but also because it is the last north woods landscape of its type in the East which has not been impressed by civilization.

The Allagash has experienced several periods of logging, yet has survived to an astonishing degree as a wilderness unity. However, to all who recognize and appreciate it as a superb natural area, its future is a matter of grave concern. Gone are the old river-driving methods of logging which left the land remote. Today bulldozers carve roads that probe deep into the backwoods of Maine and soon will crisscross the Allagash country. Behind the bulldozers come the

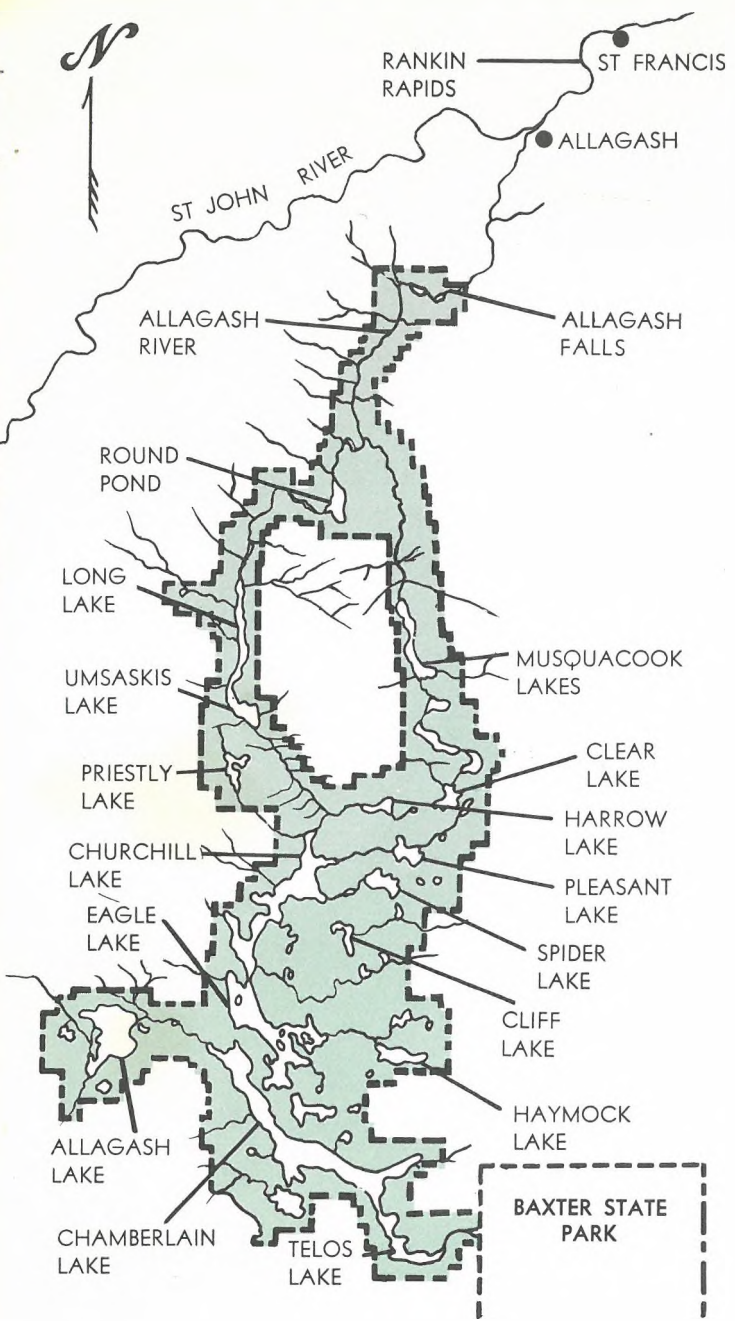


#### THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S COMMENTS ON THE ALLAGASH

"I realize that the most appropriate use of the Allagash area is a matter of some controversy. I recently held a meeting in Washington with spokesmen for the landowners in the area, who are concerned about the effect of an Allagash Recreation Area on the timber industry of Maine. This is an important factor in Maine's economy, and it cannot be ignored. On May 20, President Kennedy gave me the responsibility of reviewing and evaluating the recommendations of the International Joint Commission on the Passamaquoddy Tidal Power Project and the related proposals for hydroelectric projects on the St. John River. The latter could have a profound effect on the Allagash River.

"Obviously, such an important proposal requires careful study and attention before submitting a recommendation to the President on possible use of the Allagash area for conservation and recreation purposes. This I intend to do. I have submitted the Park Service report to appropriate State and Federal officials for comments before concluding my own review and analysis of the report."

Stewart L. Udall  
June 15, 1961



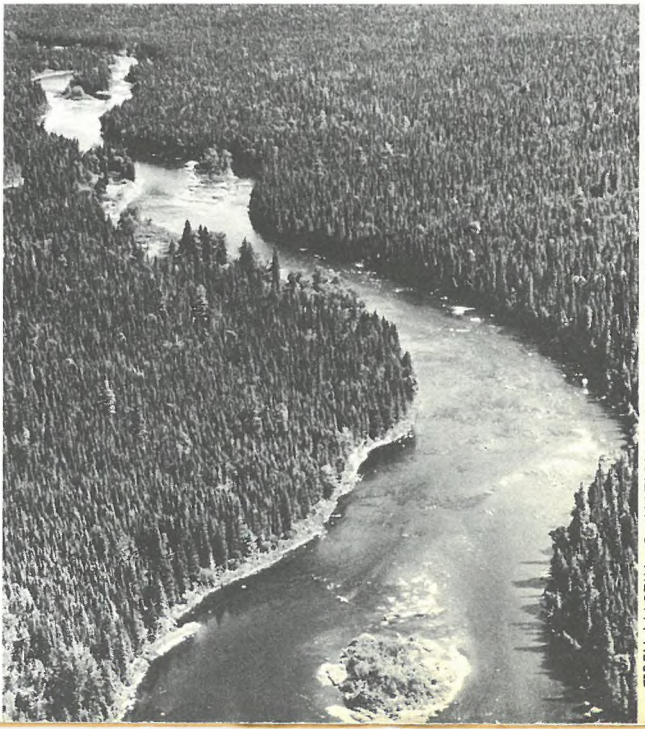
**NATIONAL PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS** preserve for the inspiration and enjoyment of the people of the United States certain outstanding landscapes of national significance. The Allagash country is such a landscape, a sleeping giant among the few remaining potential park and recreation areas of the Northeast. No other area of this size in the eastern United States exhibits the north woods environment and wilderness character of this vast complex of interconnected headwater lakes and streams. Thus it has special importance for both recreation and scientific study.

In view of this and because the integrity of the Allagash region as a remote and unspoiled area is in danger of being lost, the National Park Service proposes that a territory embracing most of the river course and tributary lakes be set aside as an Allagash National Recreation Area for wilderness recreation. This proposed area comprises 246,500 acres of forest land, noted for wildlife. In addition, 63 lakes and 360 miles of river and tributary streams, composing one of the finest natural brook trout fisheries in the United States, add 50,000 acres of water surface to the proposal, making a total area of 296,500 acres.

This concept of a recreation area stems from a 1950-55 Federal Interagency Committee survey of the resources of the New England-New York region, with the National Park Service participating.

automobiles. Airplanes land on lakes once days away by canoe and trail. And now a power dam proposal threatens the Allagash River with flooding.

**WITH THE NATION DOUBLING IN POPULATION**, preservation of this last eastern river and lake wilderness for public enjoyment will call for the most careful and farsighted land management. Otherwise its unique character will cease to exist, and with it will go an adventure, a freedom to absent oneself from civilization a while, an opportunity self-reliantly to embrace the natural world.



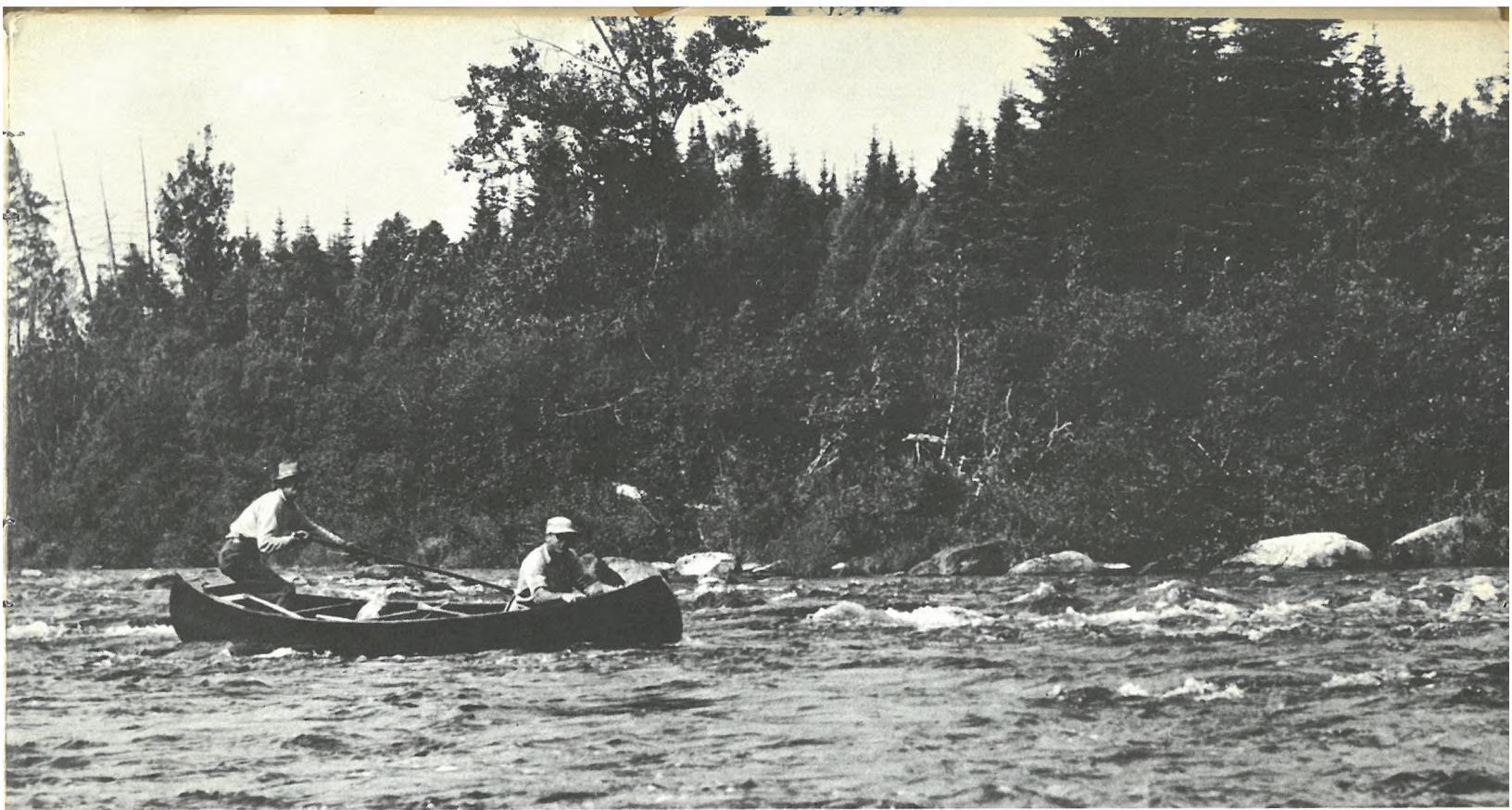
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The committee report, in which the several States concurred, offered broad recommendations for the conservation and use of the region's resources. In evaluating the St. John River basin in Maine, the committee recommended a river wilderness recreation area featuring the Allagash, which is a major tributary of the St. John. The Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments voiced its concern for the future of the river, declaring it to be "\* \* \*" in the national interest that the wilderness characteristics of the Allagash be retained unimpaired for the use and enjoyment of future generations." The Board urged the Secretary to "\* \* \*" explore all measures to devise a suitable plan to achieve this objective."

Accordingly, National Park Service field parties, with the cooperation of the State of Maine, made a careful investigation of the area. On the basis of these studies it was concluded that the scenic and recreation values of the Allagash can be adequately protected without significant impairment of Maine's important timber industry by sheathing the river course itself and its tributary lakes in a wilderness reservation. This land and the waters it contains would be administered to protect the forest scenery, with its trees and plants, and to provide careful management of wildlife and recreation use so as to preserve the wilderness character of the region for public enjoyment.



. . . *Allagash Mountain offers an Allagash panorama.*



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

THE PROPOSED ALLAGASH NATIONAL RECREATION AREA begins with the traditional portages used by canoe parties to cross from the Penobscot to the Allagash watershed. One of these follows the base of Allagash Mountain from Round Pond to Allagash Lake. Uppermost large lake on the river and perhaps the most beautiful, this splendid body of water, some three miles by two, epitomizes the large glacier-formed lakes for which Maine is justly famous. Here arbor vitae fringe the water, and gaunt pines weather the wind. Hints of a complex geology are found in the grey bedrock of the shore—rock that was smoothed and scoured by the Ice Age glaciers which sculptured this land.

The Maine Forest Service lookout tower atop 1,800-foot Allagash Mountain offers an Allagash panorama, a rolling lake-studded land marked here and there with hills and mountains. Dense forests of spruce and fir, interspersed with stands of hardwood on the ridges, carpet the landscape, and scattered white pines stand tall above the other conifers and deciduous trees. Eastward, beyond the long shining sheets of Chamberlain and Eagle Lakes, rises the blue massif of Mount Katahdin.

Allagash Stream, winding down from the watershed's ultimate sources, flows out of Allagash Lake white and racing. Round Pond detains the trout stream; then it plunges over Little Allagash Falls and ledges below before deepening in quiet bends as it nears the central lakes of the Allagash country. These lakes, Chamberlain and Telos, Eagle and Churchill, flow together in pairs to form a vast water recreation resource.



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**HISTORY CAME TO THE ALLAGASH WITH AXE AND TRAPLINE.** Old timber dams and ghost logging camps remain as relics of the stirring days of river-drive lumbering which began more than a century ago. First Britain and America quarreled over national boundaries in the bloodless Aroostook War. Then timber owners and their logging crews sparred for water rights. In order to float logs east to Bangor rather than see them go north to New Brunswick, Maine lumbermen dammed Chamberlain Lake so that it flowed into Telos. There they cut a channel through to nearby Webster Lake on the Penobscot watershed, thus diverting the entire upper Allagash drainage. Later, another dam made use of the waters of Eagle and Churchill Lakes to feed the Bangor mills. Rusting tramway cables and railroad cars remain from lumber and pulpwood operations of 50 and 30 years ago.

High road into these lakes has always been the portage from Umbazooksus Lake via Mud Pond to Chamberlain. From this 15-mile-long lake one can go up to Allagash Lake, east through Telos Lake to the Mount Katahdin country of Baxter State Park, north through Eagle and Churchill Lakes down the main stream of the Allagash River, or off to hidden ponds and brooks.



VIRGINIA S. EIFERT

Along Allagash trails one can study the details of forest and bog, which have a delicate beauty characteristic of the north woods. Here bloom such fragile plants as the fragrant twin-flower, the woodsorrel with its shamrock leaves, the ladyslipper, and the saprophytic Indian pipe.



VIRGINIA S. EIFERT



VIRGINIA S. EIFERT

Characteristic, too, are the small lace-like vines of the creeping snowberry and the four-petaled white blossoms of the bunchberry, or dwarf dogwood, which ripen in late summer into clusters of scarlet berries. In many areas the forest floor is green with ferns, and mosses cushion boulders and aged stumps.

To traverse Allagash trails and waterways is also to encounter birds and animals of many kinds, for this lake-filled land is a reservoir of northern wildlife. Spring brings warblers swarming into these woodlands, and the Peabody bird, as the white-throated sparrow is called, seems to whistle that name from every shore and glade. When summer warms, deer feed along the river banks. In the bogs and ponds moose raise dripping antlers; then submerge again to browse the roots of water lilies.







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As autumn approaches, black bears feast on blueberries. Beaver store their winter food supply of bark beneath the waters they have dammed. And when the squadrons of ducks and geese have winged southward, the leap of the snowshoe rabbit, the dart of the mink, and the lope of the bobcat are printed in thick winter snow.

The 18-mile-long waters of Eagle and Churchill Lakes form the central section of the Allagash waterway. Embayed, islanded and fed by many tributary streams, the lakes invite days of camping, fishing and exploration along shores and trails.

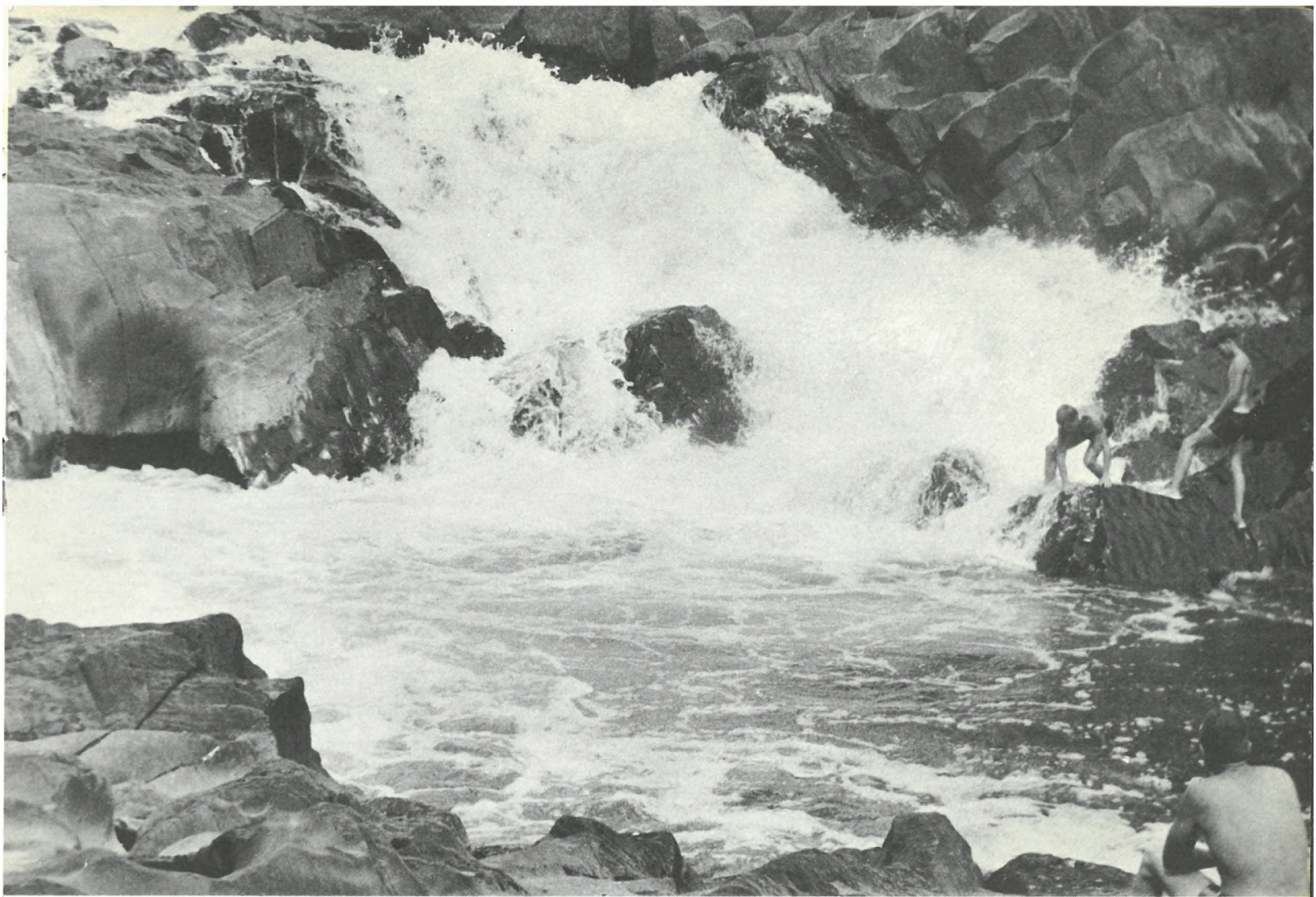
Indians once camped on the gravel bars beside these lakes, and their artifacts are still to be found. The residue of logging days rusts in the sheds and thickets around the now-abandoned Churchill logging depot at the foot of the lake.

East of the canoe route down the big lakes and folded in the hills are smaller lakes and ponds, wilder, more secluded and even more beautiful. Oval Haymock, Cliff with its bluffs and narrows, many-armed Spider, hill-guarded Pleasant and Harrow are among the larger lakes. Farther north, strung through the forest like a giant necklace, lies the Musquacook chain of lakes, draining down Musquacook Stream into the lower Allagash. Logging roads have now reached



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*. . . white water at Chase's Carry demands skill with paddle or canoe pole.*



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*. . . channels meet again to foam and rumble down the cragged chute of Allagash Falls.*

many of these lakes, and they will soon be despoiled if their primitive and secluded atmosphere is not carefully safeguarded by proper recreation management.

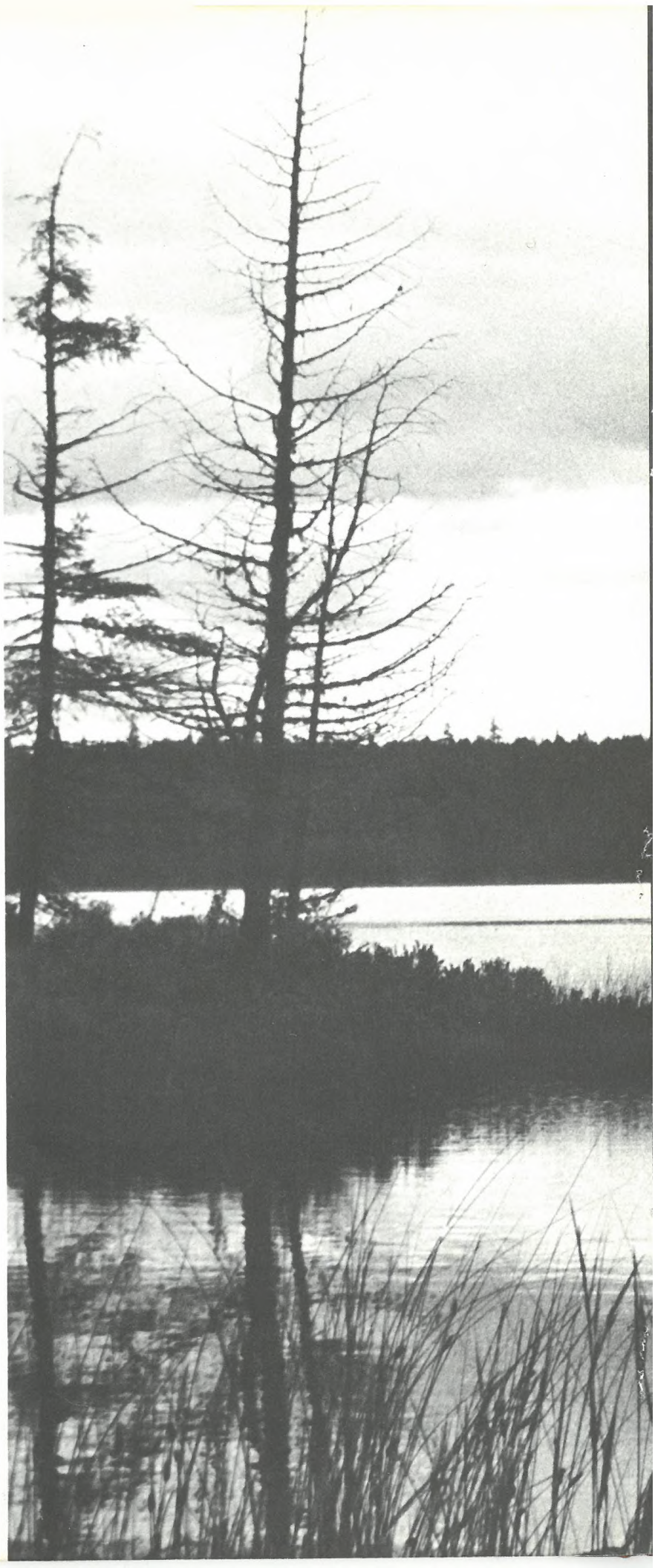
Below Churchill Lake the main Allagash River begins with a roar. There a mile and a half of exciting white water at Chase's Carry demands skill with paddle or canoe pole. Then, some seven miles farther on, the river slows to enter the graceful hill-set length of Umsaskis and Long Lakes. To the west, Priestly Mountain rises above Priestly Lake, one of the most beautiful waters of the Allagash country.

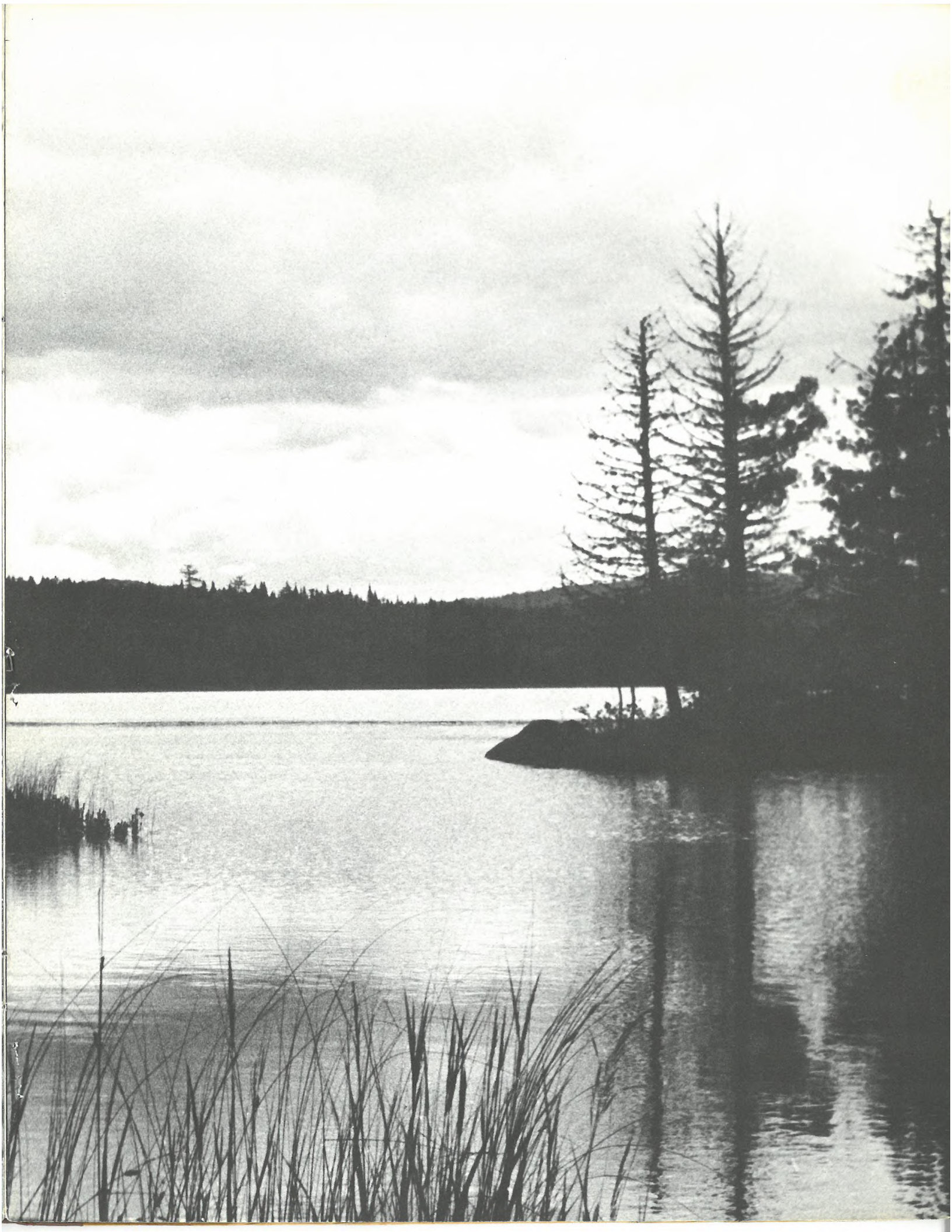
The Allagash becomes a river again below Long Lake. It is a majestic river now, some 250

feet in width; tranquil between the rocky drops which quicken the current. Spruces and firs line its banks, and paper birches lean over the water. Alders reclaim as forest the small glades that catch the sun.

The basin of Round Pond holds the river by mountains for a time; then the Allagash flows on. Downstream from the abandoned Michaud Farm, where food and fodder were produced for lumberjacks and their logging teams, picturesque islands divide the river into channels. The channels meet again to foam and rumble down the cragged chute of Allagash Falls, one of Maine's most spectacular sights. Then, in alternating calms and rapids, the river sweeps on between banks lined now with maples toward the villages of the St. John valley.

*So remote,  
so undisturbed,  
so seldom visited in the past  
has been the Allagash  
that one may ask why  
there is urgent need  
to protect it  
in the status of a  
National Recreation Area.  
Yet many threats  
imperil  
this last back country  
of lakes  
and rivers  
remaining in the East.*





AT RANKIN RAPIDS on the St. John River below the Allagash a power dam has been proposed. Such a water impoundment would flood about 98 percent of the main river course—almost to Churchill Lake, burying Allagash Falls under some 160 feet of water.

Consequent changes in water environment and the introduction of warm water species of fish would ruin the famed natural trout fishery. Important wintering grounds for deer also would be destroyed.

This dam was originally conceived as a supplement to the proposed Passamaquoddy Tidal Power Project at Eastport on the Maine coast, and it was recommended in the report of the 1950-55 Federal Interagency Committee survey. The Department of the Interior, however, protested such an unnecessary loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and of important free-flowing river course, ideal for canoe recreation. The Department recommended an alternative project on the St. John that would reduce the Allagash impoundment to the lower five miles of its course and thus spare its outstanding recreation resources.

But even if saved from flooding, the wilderness characteristics of the Allagash River country cannot long survive if the growing network of roads needed for modern logging operations opens it indiscriminately to increasing motor travel. And the travel will come to Maine. In a crowded and increasingly urban East, Maine is blessed with the bountiful recreation resources of some 2,400 lakes and 5,000 rivers and streams, and the largest per capita forest acreage in the Nation. As America's population grows, as leisure times increases, and as highways advance over the landscape, vacationists will seek out the farthest corners of Maine to find new outdoor recreation opportunities.

So far, a few have been able to find opportunity for wilderness recreation in the Allagash region—a last major opportunity in the eastern United States. The owners of the Allagash timberlands, in cooperation with the Maine Forest Service, have thoughtfully provided sites where

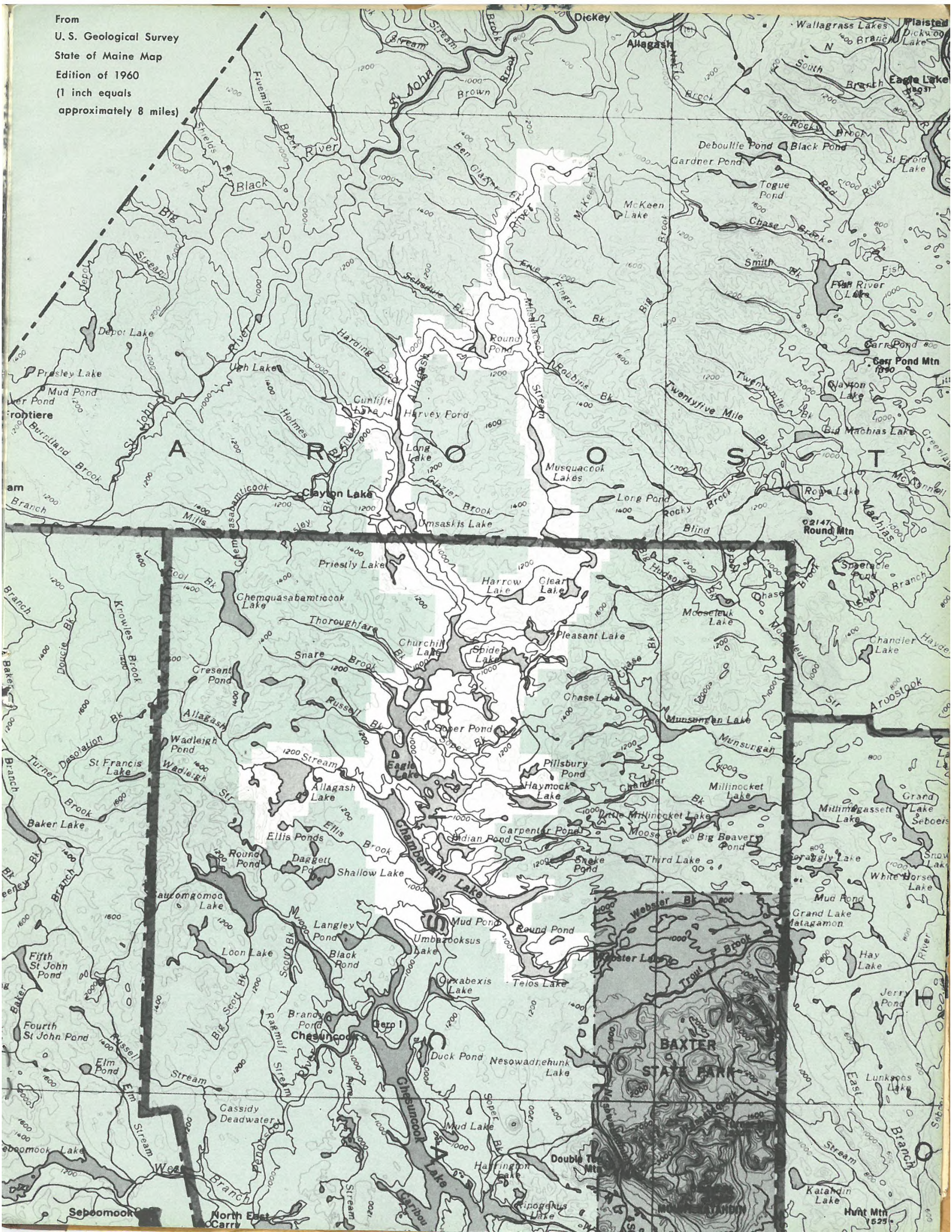
canoeists, fishermen and hunters may camp safely. Whenever logging conditions allow it, the owners also grant motorists permits to use the privately built logging roads.

But the Allagash country must fulfill a larger role in meeting increasing needs for wilderness recreation. Dedicated management for this purpose cannot reasonably be expected from private owners whose primary interest is, understandably, in an industry ultimately incompatible with the preservation of wilderness recreation values. If those values are to be protected in the Allagash country, it must be managed in the public interest primarily for wilderness recreation under consistent policies. Otherwise, under the mounting pressure for recreation, conflicting interests and land uses will abuse the natural scene, destroying recreation values prized there.

It has been stated that an Allagash preserve created out of Maine's productive forest lands would cripple the State's major industry of paper and wood products manufacturing. But the Allagash National Recreation Area proposal, comprising less than 1.5 per cent of Maine's 17 million acres of forests, would hardly seem a threat to the State's economy. On the contrary, the National Park Service believes that such a recreation area would prove a valuable economic asset to Maine.

As more and more vacationists seek the type of outdoor experience which the Allagash, and only the Allagash, affords in the East, a preserve there can continuously yield substantial dollar income from recreation. In addition, it can provide the more important but immeasurable benefits of health, happiness, inspiration and a deepened love of country. And it would remain unspoiled. Quicker dollar returns on recreational use of the Allagash could be obtained, of course, if the region were "opened up" and resorts established there. But that would sacrifice the especial value of its primitive character, a value growing ever more precious as the Nation grows. Then there would be no such lake and river wilderness left in New England—no natural haven there from the wear of civilization.

From  
U. S. Geological Survey  
State of Maine Map  
Edition of 1960  
(1 inch equals  
approximately 8 miles)

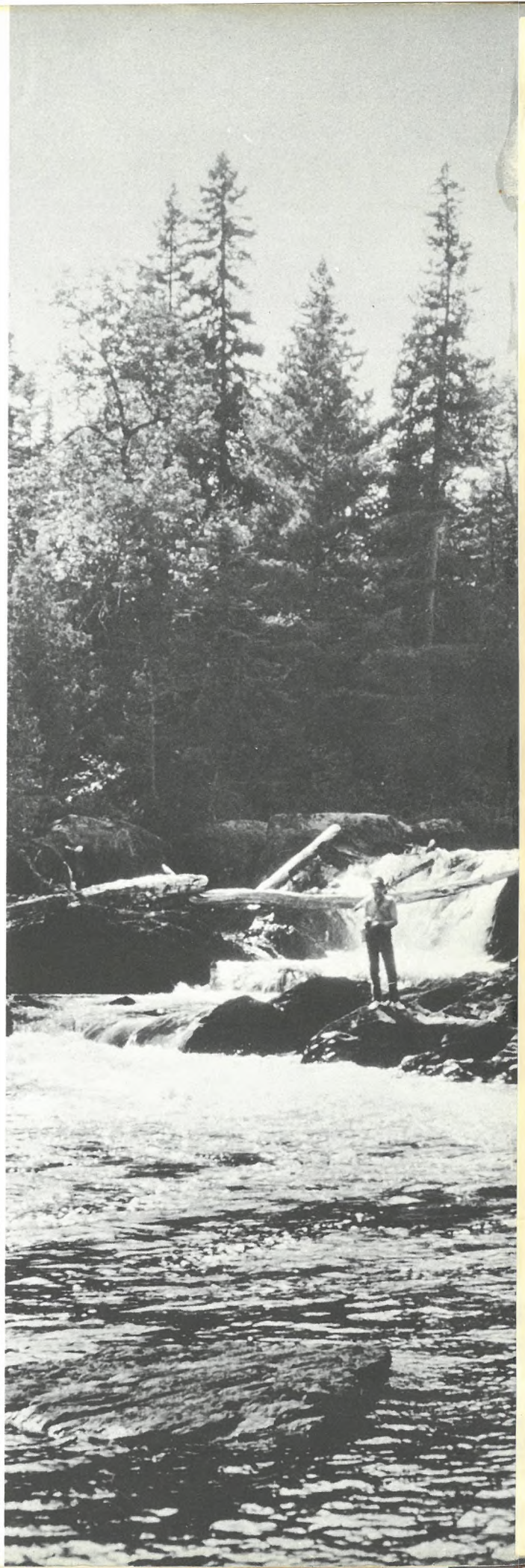


AS A NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, the Allagash can henceforth be managed and protected for public use so that future generations can know the deep and necessary kinship of the natural world. With America's wilderness now fast dwindling, such opportunities are relatively few, yet more and more people seek them.

With careful planning, access to the proposed Allagash National Recreation Area can be adequate yet placed and designed so as not to impair the natural environment of the region. At access points so planned, perhaps on several of the larger lakes, camping areas can be provided, as well as information centers and places for visitors to secure canoes and supplies in order to spend a day, a week, or all summer exploring lakes and streams in the watershed. Secluded lakeshore campsites can be adequately maintained, and a system of trails developed between lakes, to hilltop viewpoints, old abandoned lumber camps, mountainside caves and the feeding grounds of big game.

In addition to canoeing, camping and hiking, for which the Allagash country is ideally suited, visitors to the proposed recreation area could, in season, enjoy fishing for the native brook trout and togue, and hunting for deer, bear and wildfowl. The area offers excellent opportunities for scientific study of many aspects of natural history, including wilderness ecology, the great importance of which in biological research is becoming increasingly apparent. Interpretation by park naturalists of the area's biology, geology and history would greatly enrich the outdoor experience of visitors to the back country preserve.

To give such recreation opportunities maximum protection, the National Park Service, in cooperation with Maine State agencies, would insure that the native forests, marshes, streams and lakes would remain in their natural condition. Lumbering, mining or other such industrial or commercial uses should not be permitted within such a national recreation area, for these would damage its natural features and thus alter its character.



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Leisure experience in wilderness is among the most deeply refreshing and stimulating forms of outdoor recreation, yet opportunity for it is vanishing under the impact of technology and population growth. In a State, in a region, in a Nation where recreation is becoming an ever more important factor in human life, the Allagash River country presents an opportunity and a choice. There are sufficient other lands to provide for commercial timber needs. There are also many places in Maine and elsewhere where one can enjoy the varied and beneficial pastimes of the modern age.

But there are few places left where one can live in, study and enjoy the earth in its natural design, and there is only one Allagash—one such resource of its character and magnitude left in the East. It can, by default, become another casualty in the "march of civilization," or it can be preserved as an unspoiled country of adventure, a unique wilderness canoe route into an age-old dimension of human experience.

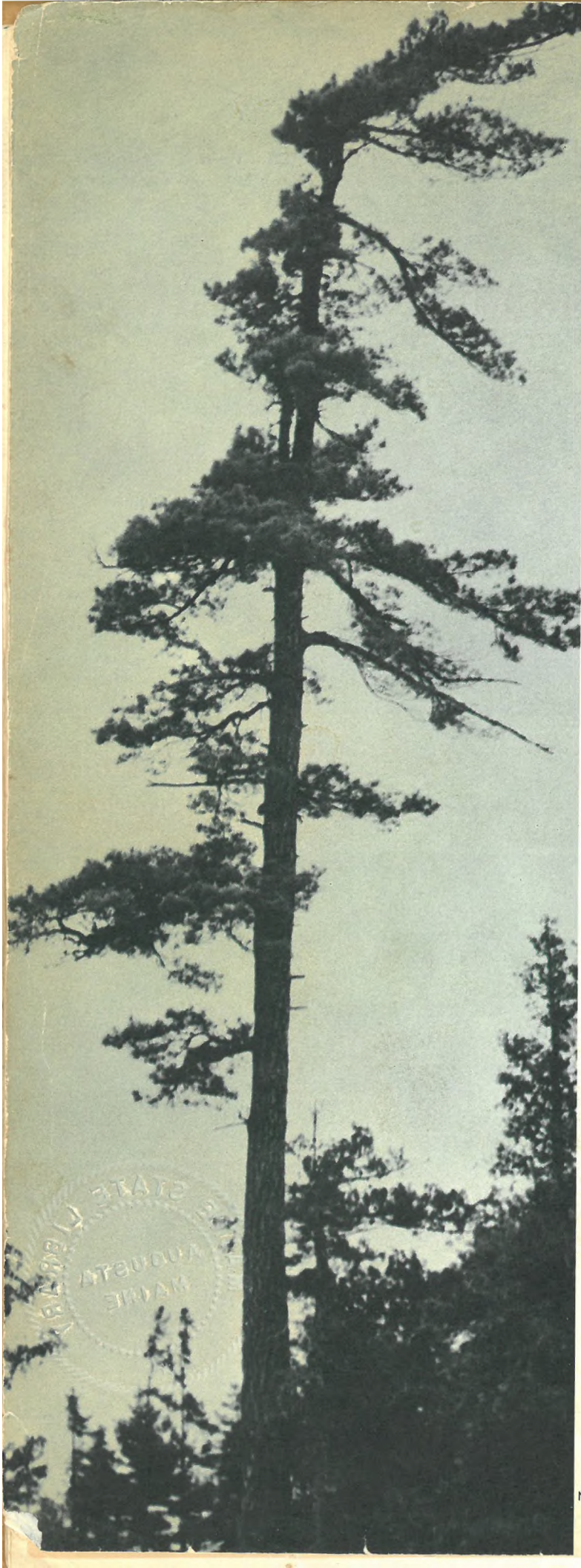


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Stewart L. Udall, Secretary



Conrad L. Wirth, Director

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