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*the real story  
of*

# Chippewa N

*I*n January 1900 University of Minnesota rhetoric professor Maria Sanford employed all of her professional skills in an editorial blast from the pages of *The Courant*, official journal of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. Her subject was the future of a large tract of forest land in north-central Minnesota, not far from the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Her tone was imperative:

"This is an urgent, an uncompromising note of warning to those who faithfully urge, at the last possible opportunity, the preservation of one body of the massive and extensive pine forests of Minnesota, free

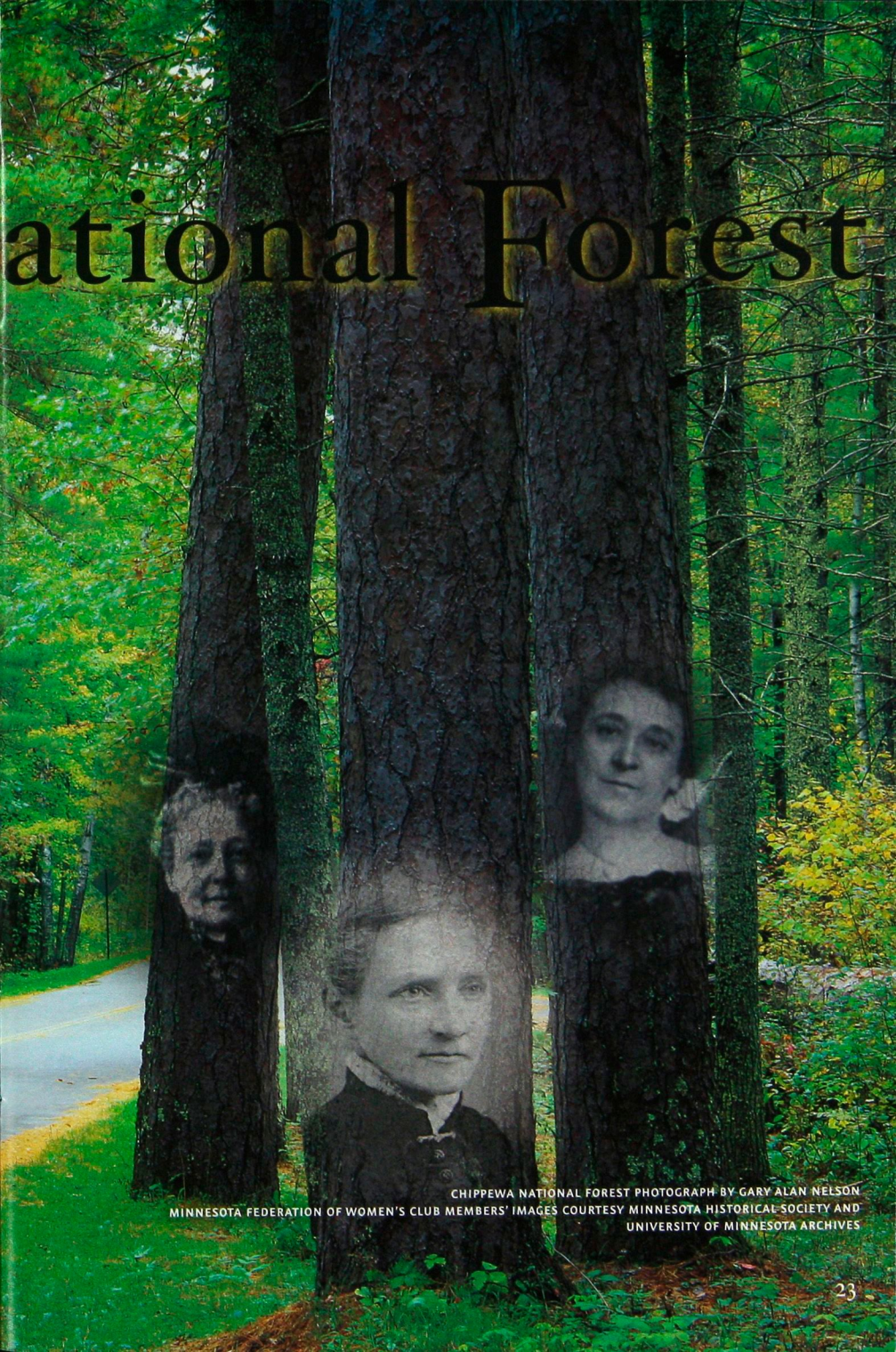
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*More than a century ago, a  
federation of feisty women fought  
to preserve the last of  
Minnesota's great north woods.*

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*By Tim Brady*

# ational Forest



CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY ALAN NELSON  
MINNESOTA FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUB MEMBERS' IMAGES COURTESY MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA ARCHIVES

from the annihilating, destructive slash of the lumberman's ax.

"State pride, health, recreation, and the best interests of this generation and of posterity, all demand that this last opportunity shall not pass without the most favorable action for a permanent forest reservation in Minnesota."

What had so riled Sanford, and others in the Federation of Women's Clubs, was the distinct possibility that federally owned lands near Cass, Leech, and Winnibigoshish lakes were about to be sold through a congressional provision known as the Nelson Act of 1889. The law, according to Sanford, would allow "millionaire lumbermen" to "saw down, chop off, and drive out every pine tree the region contains." The work, said Sanford, was all set to begin: "Mills are in active operation at and near Cass lake, lumbering camps in that region are numerous, three railroads penetrate the forests there."

She continued, "In the name of humanity, is it not possible for the American people to favorably determine the results of an occasion so fraught with inestimable benefits. . . by permanently preserving the last public white pine forest that exists in America!"

Sanford was defending what we now know as Chippewa National Forest, one of the great natural treasures of the state. Vacation land, forest laboratory, and immense natural resource, the Chippewa, among other distinctions, is home to one of the largest breeding populations of bald

eagles in Minnesota and the lower 48 states. With 400,000 acres of open water and wetlands, the Chippewa is one of the most aquatic in the U.S. Forest Service system. And where there isn't the beauty of waters, a convergence of two major ecosystems has created a rich mix of coniferous and hardwood forests.

## Health and Beauty

Over the previous 50 years, citizens had witnessed the awesome leveling of the great pine forests of Michigan and Wisconsin. The once bountiful woodland resources of the upper Midwest had been drastically reduced, and vast acres of cutover slash and stumpage stretched from Lake Huron to the Rum River in Minnesota.

While Minnesota's timber industry had likewise been cutting at a furious pace, it had not quite reached its peak lumber production in 1900. That meant the state still had forest land for developers and preservationists to battle over.

Enter the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. In Minnesota, no single organization was more active than this group in promoting scientific forestry and the nascent conservation movement.

Founded in 1895, the federation was immediately popular and influential. Its membership drew from the educated middle and upper classes, and included the wives of some of the state's most prominent leaders. In contrast to the stereotype of fussy matrons in flower-festooned hats that would later characterize the group, early members demonstrated progressive thinking and a capacity for stirring controversy. With leaders like Sanford and Margaret

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*Tim Brady helped research and write the forthcoming series Minnesota: A History of the Land for Twin Cities Public Television and the University of Minnesota's College of Natural Resources.*

Evans, principal of Carleton College and the federation's first president, the group was viewed by the popular press as the "Brainy Women of Minnesota."

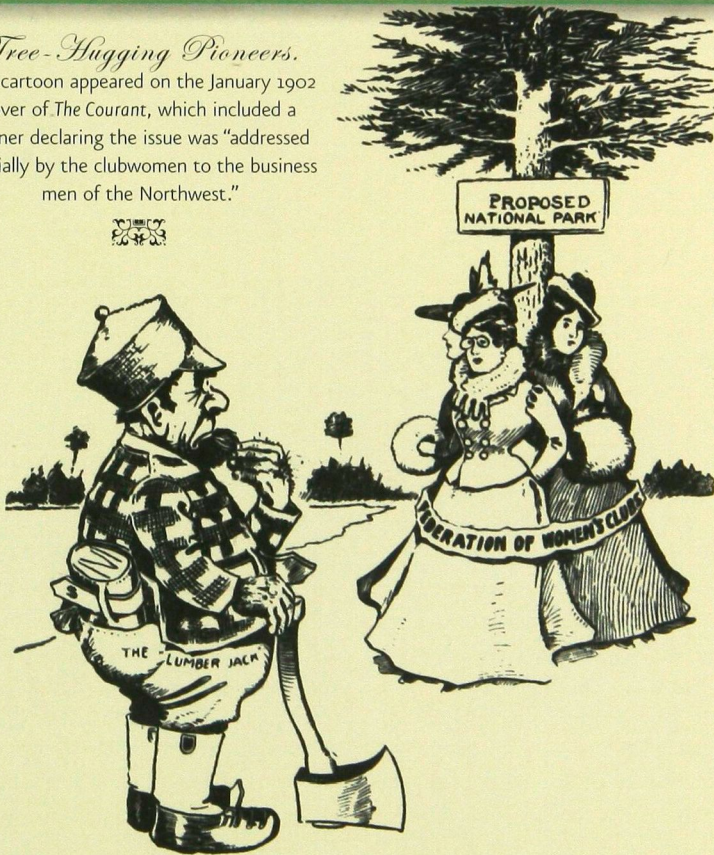
Improving educational opportunities through better library systems and the kindergarten movement were two of the group's seminal goals. It also promoted a

more systematic means of garbage collection in the Twin Cities. Likewise, members advocated public health through measures such as a tuberculin test on the milk sold in the cities by regional dairy farmers.

The federation's interest in health and beauty helped chart its path toward conservation of forests. The salubrious effect

*Tree-Hugging Pioneers.*

This cartoon appeared on the January 1902 cover of *The Courant*, which included a banner declaring the issue was "addressed officially by the clubwomen to the business men of the Northwest."

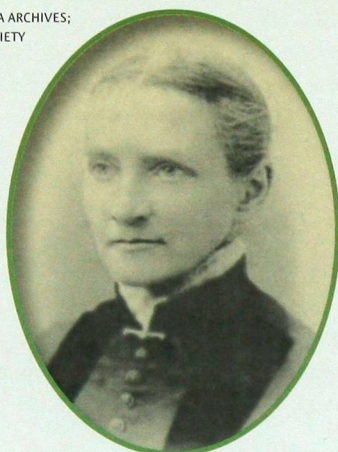


**UP AGAINST IT.**

—From St. Paul Pioneer Press.



*Florence E. Bramhall*



*Maria L. Sanford*



*Lydia P. Williams*



on lungs, heart, and head of a visit to a pristine natural setting was a well-established notion in the rapidly urbanizing America of the 1890s. The creation of parks and the promotion of outdoor activities, such as golf and bicycle riding, were high on women's clubs' agendas. It was no great leap, then, for the federation to get involved in saving this great northern pine forest.

The land "is situated in a charming lake country, largely upon non-agricultural soil," wrote Florence Bramhall, who would later head the federation's Forest Reserve Committee. It was "precious for beauty, for health-giving ozone, for influence on climate, breaking as it does the high winds sweeping down from the North and West."

### **Native Land**

The forest that would become the Chippewa had taken root amid shallow glacial depres-

sions, which evolved into bogs, lakes, and wet meadows of sedge and wild rice. Giant hardwoods and dense stands of red and white pines covered the uplands. Rich in fish and game, these woods and waters sheltered a succession of native peoples for thousands of years. The most recent of these were the Ojibwe (Chippewa), who lived on the Leech Lake Reservation at the heart of the forest.

In the 1890s this Ojibwe land became temptingly available to development by means of the Dawes Act of 1887. This onerous legislation was used to dismantle Indian tribes and force individual Indians onto farms of 80 acres apiece. Any acreage other than those individual allotments—a substantial portion of the reservation—could be made available for public sale. It was in the disposition of these Ojibwe lands where the battle lines were drawn between advocates of forest conservation and advocates of development.

Despite the implication of Sanford's rhetoric, it was not just "millionaire lumbermen" who coveted the forest. Business interests from Grand Rapids to Duluth were eager to see homesteaders and lumberjacks stream into the region. And because so much of the opposition to development centered in the Twin Cities, local people tended to view the battle as one between those who favored regional economic advancement and city "meddlers." According to one Cass Lake resident, the city folks wanted a hunting playground for "a few nabobs who have more money than brains."

The playground notion derived from the first proposal put forward by the women's federation and its allies: to create a 4-million-acre national park there. The allies included Christopher Columbus Andrews, head of the state's newly created Forestry Board; and John Cooper, a wealthy

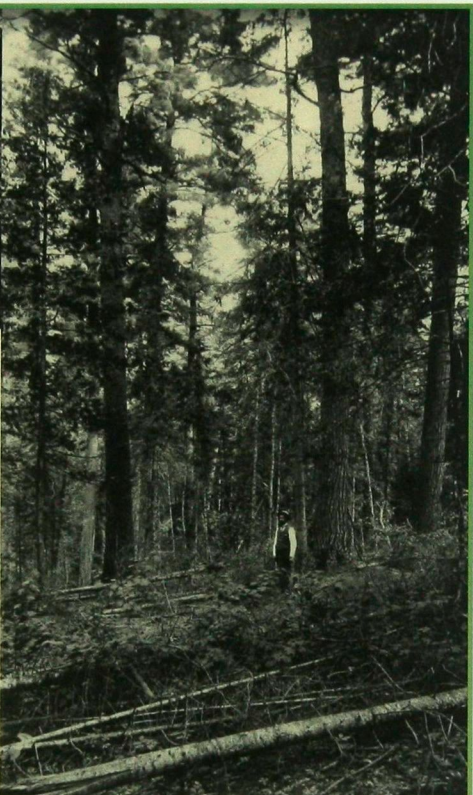
sportsman from Chicago. To help promote the idea in Washington, Cooper bankrolled and organized a Great Northern Railroad excursion to Cass Lake for 100 congressmen in October 1899.

The tour failed to impress the delegation enough to advance the park. Four million acres was an awfully dear chunk of prime timberland to take out of the marketplace.

"Not one member of Congress from Minnesota up to this time stands sponsor for the national park," wrote Sanford in *The Courant* three months later. Not only that,

*Ojibwe Lands.* The Dawes Act of 1887 made Ojibwe land temptingly available to development.





*Yesterday.* White pine had become a rare commodity in Minnesota by the time logging reached the Chippewa forest. The lumber industry was prepared to cut and haul timber even as the struggle for the forest commenced. Below, proponents of a national park brought a congressional contingent to Minnesota to see the forest's splendors. The delegation judged the forest land to be too much to spare.



but also it “is plausibly hinted in interested quarters that the Secretary of the Interior is to be legally forced to proceed with the sale of timber.”

This turn of events prompted Sanford’s fiery rhetoric about “the destructive slash of the lumbermen’s ax.” It also prompted an emergency lobbying effort by Sanford and Lydia Phillips Williams, then federation president. In February 1900 the pair boarded the train for Washington and spent the next several weeks bending the ears of the Minnesota congressional delegation. Although they managed to forestall the immediate sale of timber, the park idea remained a nonstarter.

Back in Minnesota, Florence Bramhall and her forestry committee worked to find

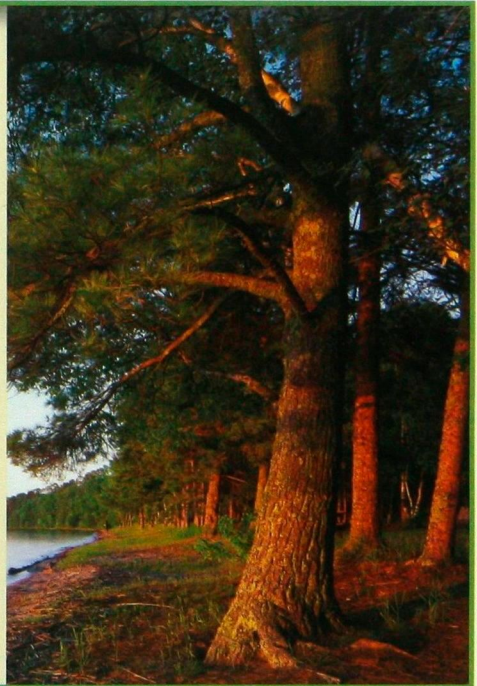
a solution to this impasse. With the counsel of Herman Haupt Chapman, superintendent of the Agricultural Experiment Station in Grand Rapids, the federation was soon touting a compromise that substantially reduced the acreage to be set aside and added provisions for a “rational cut” of timber, with provisions for reforestation. Gone was the inflammatory idea of a park for Twin Cities “nabobs.” Instead, what would be created was a forest reserve, practicing the latest in scientific forestry.

For the next year and a half, the federation, led by Bramhall and the forestry committee, did the hard, sloggy job of selling this new proposal to the people of Minnesota, and, ultimately, the U.S. Congress. Bramhall

*Today.* Originally called the Minnesota National Forest, Chippewa National Forest acquired its current name in 1928.

The forest stretches across some 1.6 million acres, including 1,300 lakes and nearly 1,000 miles of streams.

As the first forest managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the Chippewa has served as a unique laboratory, both in a scientific sense and in terms of its relationship to the forest’s many users. In the great tradition of the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs, Minnesotans remain active participants in the future of their forests. Recent revisions of the Chippewa and Superior national forest plans drew more than 7,000 letters from interested observers.





accepted invitations to address state associations of forestry, horticulture, and agriculture, where she promoted the forest reserve idea. According to Bramhall, a special issue of *The Courant* devoted to Chippewa Forest matters, “was put into the hands of the business men of St. Paul and Minneapolis, of the state editors, and wherever it was necessary that the issues involved should be clearly understood.”

The lobbying worked. Pressure from state leaders created momentum for Minnesota’s congressional delegation to, in Bramhall’s words, “arrive at some decision.” A December 1901 trip to Washington by Chapman helped further the plans. Then a final blessing came from Gifford Pinchot, head of the newly created national Division of Forestry (now the U.S. Forest Service) and friend of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Minnesota Congressman R. Page Morris introduced legislation creating a 225,000-acre forest reserve out of the lands taken from the Ojibwe reservation. In June 1902 President Roosevelt signed into law the means to create the country’s first congressionally mandated national forest.

### **Patriotic Support**

To a modern observer, the Morris Act hardly seems a great conservation victory. Indeed, the fact that Duluth and Grand Rapids development interests went away happy suggests that compromise came at a price to the forest. Just 5 percent of the full-grown forest was set aside as beauty strips along lakeshores and for reforestation purposes. A full 95 percent of the timber was made available for logging. Agricultural lands in the region were opened to settlement. And this whole great debate

### **JOURNEY THROUGH TIME**

**M**innesota: *A History of the Land*, a four-part documentary series, vividly brings to life the epic story of Minnesota landscapes and people, including the creation of Chippewa National Forest. The series, produced by the University of Minnesota’s College of Natural Resources and Twin Cities Public Television, features visually stunning images and original soundtrack. It will air on TPT in February. Visit [www.historyoftheland.org](http://www.historyoftheland.org).

was conducted at the expense of the Ojibwe people, who were left with their allotments and the price of the forest land as determined by the federal government.

What was achieved, however, was a precedent that would live on in the annals of Minnesota conservation. There were now those who were loudly, and publicly, pledged to halting the business of chewing up and disposing of the natural resources of Minnesota. These studious activists put forward conservationist plans for a wiser use of those resources.

Writing of Chippewa National Forest years later, Gifford Pinchot would say, “Here was the first application of Forestry to Government-owned forests in America. . . . Without the farsighted and patriotic support of the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs, it would have been impossible.” ●

*For information on Chippewa National Forest today, visit [www.fs.fed.us/r9/chippewa](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/chippewa), or call 218-335-8600.*

