WELL GROUNDED

Science and History AT THE HURON MOUNTAIN *Wildlife* FOUNDATION

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TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT SCIENTIFIC STUDY
OF THE LIVING THINGS, LANDS, AND WATERS
OF THE LAKE SUPERIOR REGION.

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Foreword

One sultry summer day in 2005, I strode into the main office at Huron Mountain looking for Wayne. I was on a mission. Wayne was Club manager at the time, and I needed him to open the big safe that contains important Club documents. I was working with Terry Fife and Meg Moss of History Works, a public history research firm based in Chicago, on a history of the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation.

What we found buried in the vault that day became the inspiration for this book: the original report Aldo Leopold made after his visits to the Huron Mountain Club in 1937. The original—his typed pages, his hand-colored maps, all bound and intact. To me, the president of the HMWF and an amateur but committed conservation enthusiast, this was a true treasure. I knew that the story of how Aldo Leopold, the father of modern ecology, helped to shape the Club's approach to land management in the decades to come would be an interesting one.

Now, fifty-plus years since the Foundation's charter was first established, the HMC lands and waters provide a valuable and unique laboratory for researchers from around the country. Their work has been published in respected scientific journals, and they are associated with a wide variety of prestigious institutions. The recently awarded National Science Foundation grant to the Foundation to improve its facilities at Ives Lake indicates the national reputation that the Foundation has achieved.

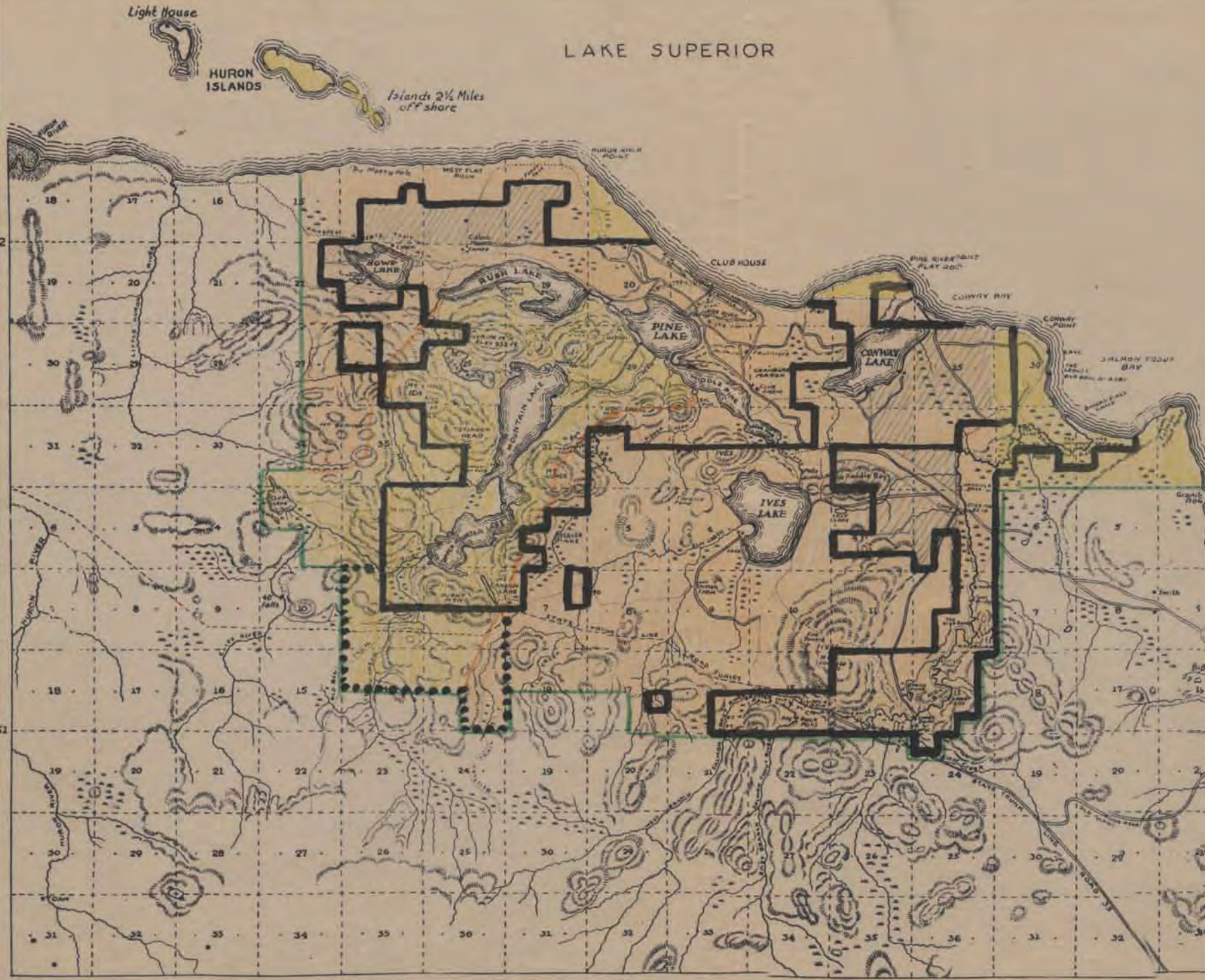
Over the years, the Foundation's mission has evolved, its focus shifting from data collecting to hypothesis testing. Using the data that has been collected over the decades in our relatively untouched ecosystems, researchers are now exploring timely ecological issues, from biodiversity to climate change. It is indeed fortunate that the "land laboratory" has remained intact and unspoiled, that the body of work done over the years is accessible, and that the Foundation can make both available to scientists today.

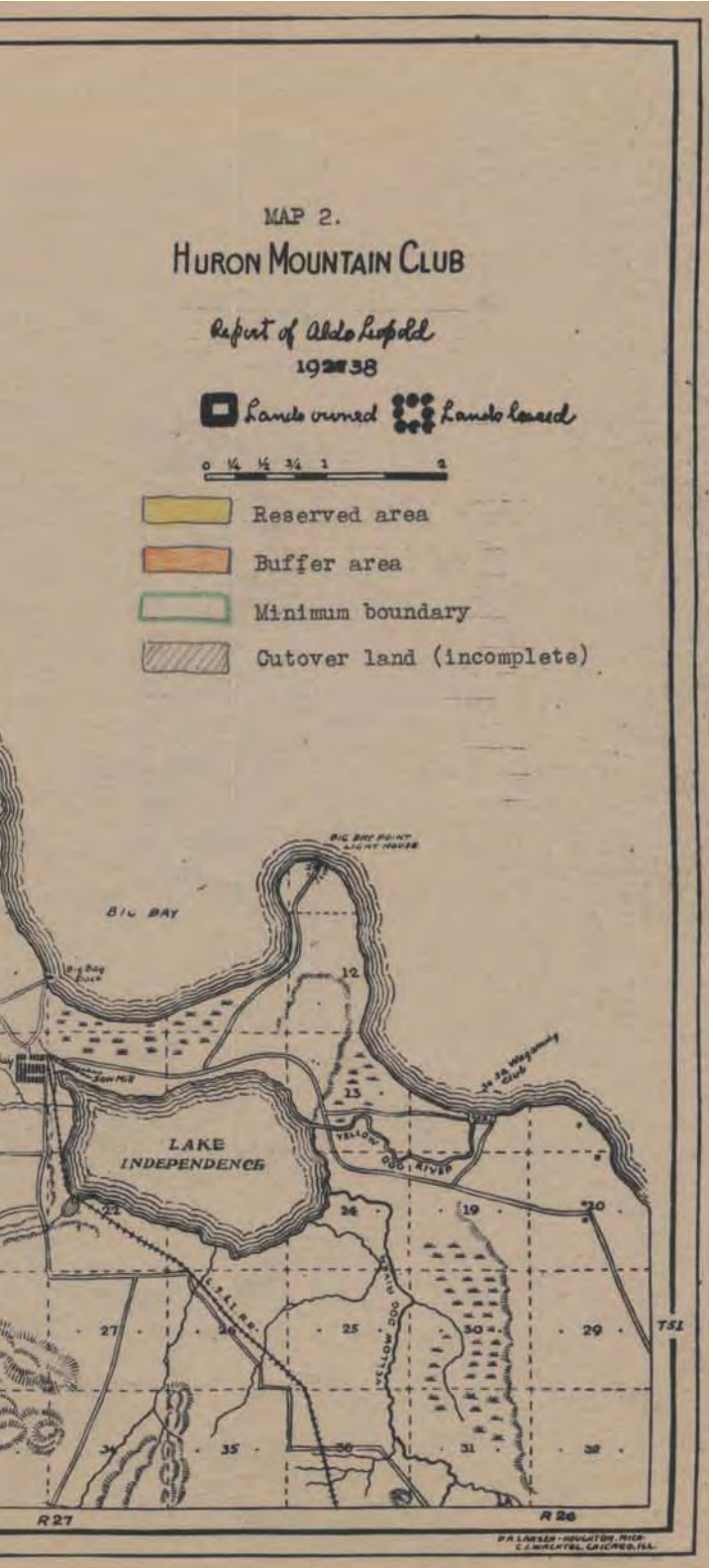
The generosity of the HMWF's loyal and generous donors makes the Foundation's mission possible. The wise people who conceived of the idea also contributed financially, and the Foundation is fortunate to have a solid and supportive funding base, most of whom come from the small but committed HMC community. We owe all of them a huge debt of thanks for keeping the Foundation alive and well.

Our well-deserved gratitude also goes to David Gosling and Kerry Woods: David, who, in twenty years as the Foundation's first scientific director, strengthened the organization's scientific base; and Kerry for inspiring us and leading us forward as the current director of research.

I hope you enjoy the story, and that you share my pride in what the Foundation has accomplished and my anticipation about what potential lies ahead.

Karie Thomson
President, Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation
2002–2007


LAKE SUPERIOR
Light House
HURON ISLANDS
Islands 2¼ Miles off shore
HOWE LAKE
RUSH LAKE
PINE LAKE
CONWAY LAKE
IVES LAKE
CLUB HOUSE
CONWAY BAY
CONWAY POINT
SALMON TROUT BAY
MOUNTAIN LAKE
HURON RIVER
752
751



Introduction

At its essence, science is an intrinsically historic pursuit. Building on previous investigations and reevaluating past boundaries of knowledge, it sculpts our perception of the world, its workings and its possibilities, into an ever finer form. Science follows no straight or clear-cut path; rather it meanders, branches, and sometimes, circles back. But it does persistently look over its shoulder to see where it has been. In so doing, science illuminates the value of those places that have a scientific past—a history—and the labors of those who, compelled by curiosity, seek to better understand it.

Consider then the work of the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation, which sponsors research on some 20,000 acres of Michigan's vast Upper Peninsula known as the Huron Mountain Club. Located along the southern shores of Lake Superior, thirty-five miles west of Marquette, the area endures as one of this nation's least touched natural havens, including over 8,000 acres of pristine, virgin hardwood forest. That this unique patch of Earth remains so today is primarily due to the Huron Mountain Club members who act as its stewards and who organized the Foundation nearly fifty-five years ago.

This book of essays addresses both the science and the history of the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation, examining in particular those places where they intersect. The benefits to science of the Huron Mountains' history as a largely unspoiled wilderness are second to none. The area effectively serves as an experimental control for Foundation researchers questing to clarify our understanding of the natural world. Moreover, the research data that exist for the region stretch back nearly a century, providing today's scientists with a luxuriously long view and reference against which to compare their contemporary studies.

Likewise, the history of fifty-five years of science at the Foundation provides a glimpse into the first half-century in the development of American ecology. In a narrower context, investigating the evolution of this organization reveals a vigorous scientific endeavor well grounded by the vision and intent of its founders. Assessing its present against the backdrop of its past offers the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation valuable data as it embarks on its next fifty years.

The second of Aldo Leopold's two maps produced in conjunction with his survey of the Huron Mountain Club shows proposed boundaries for a "reserved area," adjacent "buffer area," and additional property to be acquired, 1938.

Above: Looking across Ives Lake from the Stone House, 1988

Opposite: William Harris at skinning table while conducting field research with University of Michigan colleagues in Arizona, 1930

Collaboration: William Harris & Aldo Leopold

Meg Moss

On March 26, 1955, Edith Farwell, Elizabeth DeLong, Katherine Dunbaugh, and Laird Bell held the first meeting of the board of directors of the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation. (William P. Harris, Jr. was absent.) President Laird Bell set forth a program for the Foundation:

The property of the Huron Mountain Club constitutes an exceptional laboratory for the study of forestry and wildlife under primitive wilderness conditions. It has material for studies of forestry, animal life, fishing, botany, geology, and other natural phenomena. Wildlife experts like the late Aldo Leopold have surveyed the possibilities and recommended that the facilities be made available to scientists in these several fields. Occasional individual studies have been made on the Club lands in the field of botany, of small mammal life, of selective cutting practices in the forests and in some other fields, and, particularly of late, members of the Club have themselves studied the area and made collections of relevant material, some of which are now housed in the museum on the Club grounds. These activities have been sufficient to make it clear that the Club property does constitute an opportunity for intensive study in these fields. . . .

The concept had been in the works a while. Variations on the theme of scientific research at the Huron Mountain Club had seasoned in the minds of members for decades. Various precursors came and went, elements of the idea surfaced over time, and slowly the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation took root.

A broad cast of characters populates the prehistory of the HMWF, both club members and outsiders. "Woodsmen" all, each brought a different perspective to the conversation about the Club's responsibility to the land under its stewardship. Through subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle interaction over the years, these players succeeded in achieving enough of a consensus to give the Foundation form. In the fifty-five years since then, it has continued to evolve and grow.

From the troupe of notables, two larger-than-life personalities surface. One an outsider and one a Club member, their relationship captures well the cooperative venture that the HMWF still represents. Aldo Leopold, the father of modern ecology and professor of wildlife, and William P. Harris, Jr., the quintessential gentleman naturalist and long-time Huron Mountain Club member, worked closely together to develop and suggest a stewardship strategy that would take into account the needs of both wildlife and woodsmen (and women) in the years to come. Integral to the plan was the establishment of a scientific research station on Club property.

Left: William Harris, 1940s

Right: Aldo Leopold inspecting red pines near “the Shack” in Baraboo, Wisconsin, 1946

"A Laboratory for Wild Life Research"

William Pickett Harris, Jr. met Aldo Leopold for the first time in November 1937 at the Third Midwest Wildlife Conference held in the Memorial Union on the campus of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. About 150 delegates representing conservation agencies, the Forest Service, universities, the Farm Security Administration, and the Bureau of Fisheries had convened from states all around the Midwest. The theme of the conference would deal with "questions of how to conserve, not whether to conserve, the game, fish, fur, song-bird and wild flower resources of the region." Delegates heard reports on waterfowl censuses, deer herd statistics, nesting studies, fish management, and other technical and scientific topics over the three-day meeting.

Leopold, as professor of "game management" at UW, had a hand in chairing the conference, while Harris no doubt attended out of his own personal interest in the subject matter. He also went to speak to Leopold about the possibility of hiring him to consult on the land management challenges facing the Huron Mountain Club, a privately owned tract of unscathed wilderness on the Michigan shore of Lake Superior. He left Leopold with reading material about the Club and promptly wrote a follow-up letter upon his return home to Grosse Pointe, Michigan:

My dear Mr. Leopold:
It was a great pleasure to have been at the meeting in Madison last week and to have had a talk with you. I think from our conversation and memorandum, you have a pretty good idea regarding the aims and attitude of the group of members of the Huron Mountain Club which I am representing toward the kind of wild life management and research program which we hope to establish.

I know that you could be of great service to us if you would come over to the Club next spring or summer, and after looking the place over give us your opinion on how we could best proceed to manage the area in order to make the best use of our forests for silva culture, wild life and the unique aesthetic values which the place offers. There is also the question of the suitability of the use of our area as a laboratory for wild life research to be considered.

This was not the first time Harris and the Club had engaged the expertise of an outsider. In 1927, Carl Hubbs, curator of fishes at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, conducted an intensive study of the Club's fish fauna. Then, in 1933, William Harris sought the opinion of P. S. Lovejoy as to a "wildlife policy for the Huron Mountain Club." Well known—and respected—in conservation circles as the cantankerous and folksy head of the game division of the Michigan Department of Conservation, Lovejoy responded in a six-page epistle to Harris, opining about everything from "barber-shop biologists" to the scourge of monoculture and the shortsighted, tunnel-vision "tinkerings" of hunters, fishermen, farmers, and even conservation officers:

But maybe I'm out of focus. Most of my time for thirty years has been going into the effort to remedy some manner of previous tinkering which has left miserable bummed up country in its wake; fire-bummed, ditch-bummed, plow-bummed, gun-bummed, or now and then, something on the bum as a result of mawkish sentiment or of "science" picked too green. . . .

If I have a clean-cut opinion, it is to the effect that your main Club effort should go first of all into the protection of the property against violently disturbing factors such as fire. I'd suspect that you were taking very long and unnecessary chances there, I've never seen such a Club that wasn't.

My notion is that your opportunity to maintain an unbummed and virgin tract is altogether exceptional, and that any tinkerings with it should be very mild and highly tentative.

Above: One of the many deer Harris captured in his nighttime photography, 1920s

Opposite: Club cabins along Pine River, circa 1912

If I have a specific suggestion of a constructive sort, it is that your layout offers one of the few remaining chances to find out, with decent precision and using all the modern tools, just what there is and what goes on in a virgin and unbummed country like that. . . .

By November 1937, Club member Laird Bell had come forward with an offer to fund a wildlife management study. Bill Harris promptly consulted the director of the Museum of Zoology at the University of Michigan (where he held the post of honorary curator of mammals) for advice regarding such a study. Frederick Gaige made his recommendations in a thoughtful four-page letter, stating that

It is our opinion that the Huron Mountain Club property constitutes a unique natural area and one especially suited for the preservation of van-

ishing types of wildlife and for the study of the native fauna and flora. He concluded by suggesting that the supervision of such a study should be assigned to a competent field biologist.

The Gentleman Naturalist and the Wildlife Professor

Though Bill Harris never made his living in the field of wildlife conservation (he worked as an investment banker), it was, perhaps, his first love. A self-taught, lifelong naturalist—with a particular interest in the classification of squirrels—Harris earned the regard of scientists and laypeople alike. Over his career, he published scores of articles and monographs and, at age thirty, was made honorary curator of mammals at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, a position he would hold, and cherish, until his death in 1972. Harris had grown up in the Detroit suburbs loving the out of doors and devouring the nature books of Earnest Thomas Seton, Charles G. D. Roberts, and W. H. Hudson. He joined the army in 1918 and matriculated into Yale's Sheffield Scientific School in 1919 after the end of World War I. By all accounts shy, he nonetheless had a flair for the dramatic, as he starred in theatrical productions on campus. College records show that he resigned minus a degree in 1921, at which time his father arranged for him to accompany photographer, artist, and author Radclyffe Dugmore on a photographic safari to Africa.

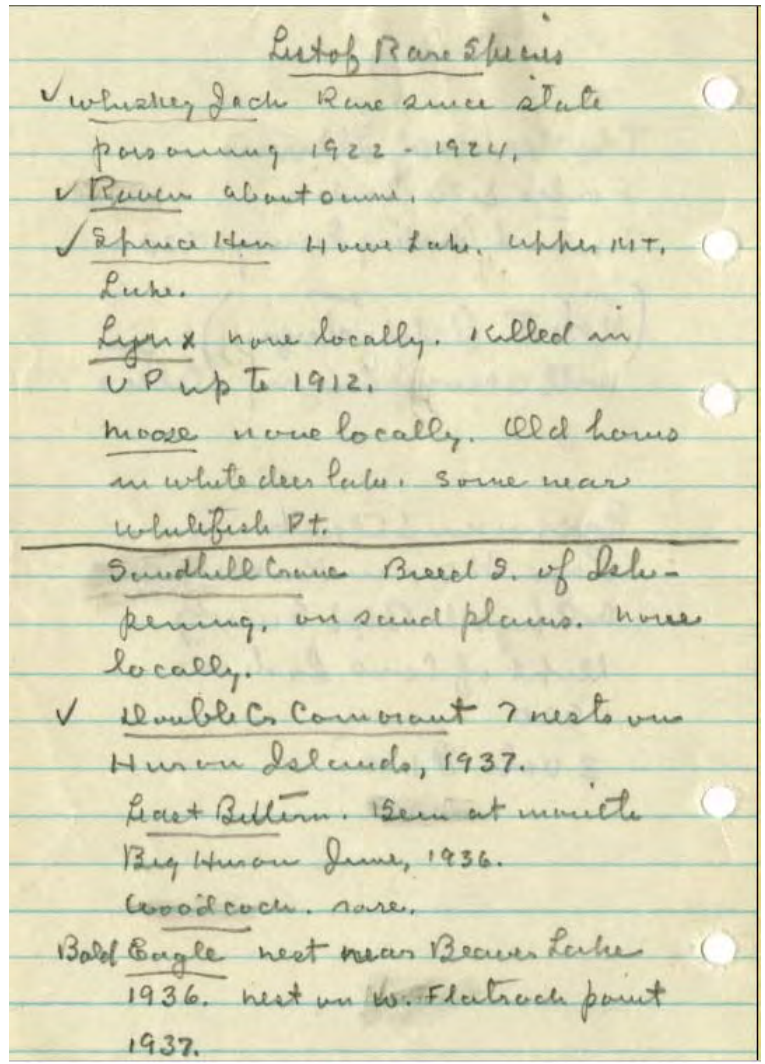
Harris's roots at the Huron Mountain Club went back to his boyhood when the family visited their McGraw cousins there. His father purchased a Harris family cabin in 1917, which the younger Harris took over in 1922, just before his marriage the next year. He occupied his time at the Club surveying the mammals and inviting friends from the Detroit Naturalists Club and the Museum of Zoology to conduct surveys on the grounds. His trip to Africa may have inspired his flash photography hobby, "shining" as he called it, which yielded spectacular nighttime images of animals in their habitats. He headed the short-lived Conservation Committee in 1924, which proposed in 1925:

Top: Sign marking Club's uncut acres of forest, 1930s

Center: Maples and hemlocks near Mountain Lake, 2004

Bottom: Black bear ascending apple tree near Ives Lake, 1981

Opposite: Leopold's field notes on the rare species found on Club property, 1938



List of Rare Species

✓ Whistling Swan Rare since State
poisoning 1922 - 1924.
✓ Raven about extinct.
✓ Spruce Hen Horse Lake, upper Mt.
Lake.
Lynx none locally. Killed in
UP up to 1912.
moose none locally. Old horns
in white deer lake. Some near
whitefish Pt.
Sandhill Crane Breed S. of Delta
prairies, on sand plains. None
locally.
✓ Double Cr. Cormorant 7 nests on
Huron Islands, 1937.
East Bottom. Seen at mouth
Big Huron June, 1936.
Woodcock. rare.
Bald Eagle nest near Beaver Lake
1936. nest on W. Flatrock point
1937.

"Study Your Own Flowers"

And so Leopold went to work, making the first of two visits to the Club from May 28 through June 2, 1938. He spent the time "reading the land": charting the "browsing" lines left by deer on the cedars; assessing the varieties and viability of the trees; noting the incursion of logging and road building activities just outside the Club's boundaries. He studied the way Club members interacted with their wilderness as well, especially in regard to the killing of fish and game predators. Within two weeks he had completed and delivered his eighteen-page *Report on Huron Mountain Club*. His fee amounted to $240 (an amount worth about $3,600 today), generously underwritten by Laird Bell, then a director of the Club with an intense interest in the issues of land management and scientific research.

Leopold's report set off the chain of events that would finally lead to the establishment of the HMWF. On the first page he enumerated four "outstanding values" of the property, number two being "Scientific study." On page 5, under the heading "Land Plan," he even pushed the point in discussing the need for acquiring land to buffer and preserve the Club's wilderness:

Assuming the financial conditions within the Club preclude any heavy [land] purchase program, it seems to me more likely that help could be obtained as a combination club and scientific area than merely as a club.

"Your report has circulated up & down & has met with universal approval & enthusiasm," Harris wrote Leopold on August 8, just before Leopold made another trip up to the Club to conduct some further study. He would also then present his findings in a slide show to the general membership. For that encounter, he summarized his recommendations for the Club as follows:

1. *Set aside the Mountain Lake basin as a "natural area" for scientific research. Encourage scientific institutions to use it.*
2. *Surround it by a buffer zone. This may be logged selectively to bring revenue, increase deer food, and diversify wild life.*
3. *Start research on the animal life of the region, with special emphasis on the deer-wolf problem.*
4. *Reverse the predator-control policy. Make the Club property, and if possible the region, an example of natural (as against artificialized) biological management. Make the property a refuge for threatened species, especially wolf, otter, fisher, marten, black bear, spruce hen, raven, duckhawk, bald eagle, Canada jay.*
5. *Exclude further roads; plant no more exotic species; tighten fire control.*
6. *Encourage participation by members in scientific field work. Start a natural history library and museum. Start a weather station. Start biological record-keeping.*

Leopold's shorthand notes for his talk included, as his second point,

How shape events? As a Club? Cards are stacked against large private holdings, especially idle ones. Who else is interested in large idle holdings? Science. Natural allies: Universities, research groups, scientific foundations, scientific societies. Why and how? To understand used land, must study unused, i.e., virgin.

He went so far in the same presentation to suggest particular studies that could be undertaken on HMC land: tree rings, habitats (his example: pitcher plants on a log), tracing glacial lakes by beach plants, wildflower management, what kills maples?, and snow damage studies. Keen on involving the Club's members in these scientific endeavors, he ended the evening's remarks by urging, "Whether or no science comes, study your own flowers." (He would continue to promote wildlife research to the layperson as a new sport, writing in 1943, "The real game is in decoding the messages written on the face of the land.")