

Farm Families and Forest Agents Locked in Fight to Finish for Land

By CARL ROEHL
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EAGLE — What happens to a family that has devoted a lifetime to building up a farm, then learns it may have to give it up?

The Austin Boweys, Eagle Rt. 1, and others living in the path of Kettle Moraine forest are in that situation. They don't know the answer.

And they are worried.

The state is attempting to acquire their land for the forest.

"My husband was born here. The property has been in the family since 1905," related Mrs. Bowey. "Where could a man 50 years old get a job, when all he knows is farming?"

"If we had to leave here, we'd have to start all over again. And with the price they (the state) are offering, how could we afford to?"

The Boweys farm is about 160 acres. "It's good land; that's why we farm the whole thing," Mrs. Bowey said.

For the past five or six years, the conservation department has been attempting to purchase the farm, she said.

Conservation representatives said "they were interested in buying all of the land from here to Palmyra and that within 10 years they would get it all," according to Mrs. Bowey.

But the Boweys are not interested in selling, although "maybe in 15 years we would be."

The fear that the state will condemn their land if they fail to sell is apparently causing anxiety for many farmers in the area, who, like the Boweys, don't want to leave their land.

"Conservation department officials offered to pay our school tax several years ago if they could use the woods, but we turned it down because they said our kids wouldn't even be allowed to shoot a bow and arrow in there," Mrs. Bowey related.

The Boweys have been visited about seven times during the past year by state officials asking them if they would like to sell their land, Mrs. Bowey said.

"I've been so upset, I dream about it and bawl about it. They talk about civil

rights. We should have the right to sell the land when we want, to whom we want and for the price we want," Mrs. Bowey contended.

Because the state charges \$2 per car and 50 cents per person for scouts to camp in the state forest, a local troop camps, instead, on the Bowey property.

"We have hayrides and wiener roasts for 4-H and church groups, and now they want to take it away. I don't think it's fair," Mrs. Bowey said.

The Boweys have spent over \$5,000 in repairs and remodeling of their home but are uncertain whether to continue. "You don't want to put in paneling at \$12 a foot for them to burn up," Mrs. Bowey said.

Another woman living on a farm near Eagle said she and her husband had spent nine months remodeling their home, at a cost of over \$10,000 and that their home would cost about \$30,000 to replace.

But the offer from the state for the property "didn't include anything for the buildings," although it would be a good price for the land alone," the woman said.

She asked that her name not be used, fearing the state would lower its price offered to them if she criticized conservation officials.

Last spring, she said, a car was parked on their lawn, while two conservation department representatives were looking over the farm. They had not asked for permission to enter the property, she said, although on other occasions her husband had given them permission to examine the property.

A Madison conservation official said, "We will take all the land as far as the eye can see, and we don't give a damn if the people like it or not," the woman said. The official, whose name she did not know, had made the statement to her husband, she said.

It was at that time that he decided "not to sell an inch" but to fight any attempts by the state to obtain the lands, she said.

"It's nerve wracking," the woman said, almost in tears. "They called, sometimes twice a day, asking to talk about buying the land."

Although no direct threat of con-

demnation has been made by state officials to him, according to Don Wilton, Eagle Rt. 1, "I asked him (a conservation department representative) what were my chances of staying (on the farm) and he said, 'none.'"

Wilton said he "could not replace the farm any place in Waukesha county for the price the state had offered me." A conservation department representative "talked to my brother and asked him to try to convince me to sell," Wilton said.

The 238 acres Wilton is farming had been farmed by his father and before that his grandfather.

"I told them I don't intend to move, but I don't know where I stand," Wilton said.

The W. L. Boydens of Eagle have sold their farm of about 200 acres to the state.

"I think they would have condemned us if we wouldn't have sold," Mrs. Boyden said. "Every week, there would be a man here asking us to sell and we said definitely not. We had put quite a bit of money in the place, but they said 'we will take it, you're next on our list . . .'" Mrs. Boyden said. A state representative whom the Boydens talked to "said he had condemnation papers on his desk if we didn't sell," she said.

"He suggested we take up their offer or they would put their own price on it and take it," Mrs. Boyden said. "We really didn't want to sell it. The family was quite disappointed."

The family has now given up farming. The Boydens' sons now work in a factory.

"We were pretty upset and had ideas of fighting them, but it would have cost too much money," Mrs. Boyden said. "We didn't make any money on it, but we didn't lose anything — we came out even."

For many property owners in the area, the situation is quite different from that of the Wiltons, Boweys and Boydens. They were willing to sell, if they could obtain what they wanted for the land. Some of them had been attempting to sell to private buyers, but found they could no longer expect the price they sought because of the state's plans in the area.

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(Freeman Staff Photo)

Boy Scouts of Milwaukee's troop 570 march across the state forest. The Boweys and others are not anxious for the state to take over Kettle Moraine land.



(Freeman Staff Photo)

Mr. and Mrs. Austin Bowey of Eagle Rt. 1 stand in front