

Return visit

In September of 2018, I took my family to PANP to introduce them to where I had grown up and to reacquaint myself as well. We made the trip over to Sturgeon Crossing where I had lived for nine years. I had not been there since we moved to Silver Grove in 1954. The only original building left on the Sturgeon Crossing property is the warden's equipment building. My Grandfather Charlie Fowler was a carpenter and, in the early 1950s, he had a contract with the Park to build that building. What amazed me most was my 7 year old recollection of that building and how big it was to my eyes then as compared to how small it is today to my 70 year old eyes. It must have shrunk over the years.



I also remember the contents of that building. There were two WAJAX fire pumps with their associated suction hoses and tool kit. Two ten-man field kitchens, axes, shovels, pulaskis*, and back packs with four 100 foot lengths of linen hose in each. In short enough equipment to equip two ten-man firefighting crews.



*A pulaski is a special hand tool used in fighting wildfires. It combines an axe and an adze in one head mounted on a rigid wood handle. It is used for constructing fire breaks because it is able to both dig soil and chop wood.

The view from Sturgeon Crossing was spectacular when I lived there. The warden's cabin was situated high on the east bank of the Sturgeon River Valley. Looking to the west you could see a wide vista of the river valley that extended south several miles to Tap Creek Hill and even further to the north. The east facing slopes of the river valley were open grassland that extended from the valley floor all the way up the bank and several hundred yards back from the crest of the bank to the tree line. In the 1950s the Park followed a policy of spring burning that called for burning those grasslands. I remember walking north from Sturgeon Crossing on the boundary road with my dad, a box of Eddy matches in hand. Every few feet we would take turns scratching a match and tossing it into the grass beside the road and watching the fire roar up the hill and then die out in the snow that was still present in the trees at the top. It was great fun.

The hillsides would be burned black but within a few days they would be brilliant green with lush new growth. The gophers (Richardson Ground Squirrels) would come out en masse. Badgers would be there to dig out the gophers' dens for the sweet treats they contained. Fox would be there on the hunt with

hawks overhead waiting to swoop down for a meal. Elk would gather on the hillsides to graze on the new grass. Later in the summer First Nation families would come to harvest Seneca root. Now those hillsides are covered with scrub poplar right down to the valley floor.

I don't have the credentials to speak to the ecological or environmental aspects of the spring burning policy, but I doubt you would find gophers, badger or Seneca on those hillsides today.

