



CCC Camp at Cusino Wildlife Research Station Near Shingleton, MI. Photo Courtesy of Michigan Historical Center

Cusino Wildlife Research Station

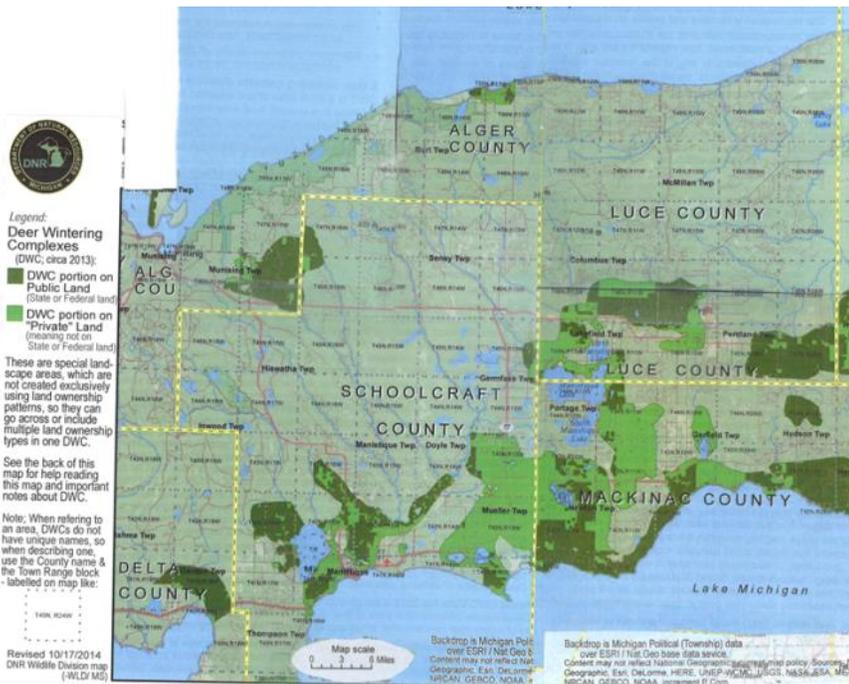
Long and Unique History

Alger County - Michigan As one passes through the small town of Shingleton on M-28 (Michigan Highway) in eastern Alger County, one notices a sign for the Cusino Wildlife Research Station. In the late 1800's, the C. H. Worcester Lumber Company established a sawmill, office and lumber camp in an area south of the small community of Melstrand and northwest of Shingleton in Alger County. Originally named Cusino after a French fur trapper name Cousineau, the area had been a lumber camp and a Civilian Conservation Corps camp before becoming a state wildlife research area. This state-owned (Department of Natural Resources) area has a unique and interesting history tied to deer research.

Early in the history of Michigan Conservation, the former Department of Conservation documented the existence of a sizeable deer yard in Alger and Schoolcraft counties. Meanwhile, biologists exploring the Cusino area noted large cedar swamps that seemed to attract deer. By the late 1920's after mapping the large cedar swamps and interviewing loggers around Cusino, scientists estimated a high deer population of 4,000 animals. In 1930, the State Game Commission purchased 32,000 acres for a reserve and public hunting area.

In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began using the old town of Cusino (bereft of lumber and mostly abandoned) for a camp that eventually housed over 200 men. Primitive conditions forced the men to get up hourly in the winter to feed small stoves in their dorms. Michigan has preserved some of the stories from that time. Visit (<http://absolutemichigan.com/michigan/seeking-michigan-cold-conservation-corps/>) to view a video from a CCC crew member telling his stories of the area. In 1936 the CCC crew began constructing deer pens and a moose corral on nearby state lands in partnership with the State of Michigan and in 1939, a Biennial Report recommended authorization of a wildlife experiment station at the camp.

Because of deteriorating conditions at the CCC camp, the original Cusino Research Station was moved to Cusino Lake (formerly Round Lake). While the buildings were completed in 1937, no one used them until 1946. Many CCC men volunteered for military service after the United States entered World War II and the CCC program closed in 1942. Before the war, the state intended M-28 to follow the Fox River Road, meaning a major UP highway would cross directly in front of the station. However, in the post war infrastructure boom, the highway was not relocated to the Fox River Road, thus the new – and barely used – station was even more remote than before. Ownership of the structures at Cusino Lake were then passed from the State of Michigan to the University of Michigan and Northwestern University, then to Western Michigan University, and then in 1966 to Northern Michigan University. After using the station as a field camp, Northern eventually sold the 15



acres to a private landowner. Distinctive stone structures (lodge and outbuildings) built in classic CCC style can still be seen today on the north shore of Cusino Lake (note – the building are now in private ownership).

The new Cusino Research Station was built along with a prison camp directly on M-28 just west of Shingleton. The US Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to fund the construction of the station if the research was tied to practical management on the land; being applied and not academic in nature. The golden age of research began in 1951 with a new building and a square-mile enclosure (constructed by prison inmate labor).

Deer Wintering Yard Complexes Mapped by DNR .The most NW dark green winter yard is the one discussed in this story.

Many studies lasting at least 60 years began at the old Cusino CCC camp and

continued at the current station on M-28. Research included:

- Research on trapping and managing deer in enclosures.
- Old Cusino: Moose research with 71 animals moved from Isle Royale to Cusino to research how to keep moose in captivity. Research very successful as it was determined that moose need ponds and wallows to replace sodium lost in their urine. Many tours were given by CCC crews of the moose corral area.
- Research performed by Curly Davenport including some of the country's first nutrition studies on white-tailed deer in the mid-1930's to the early 1940's. This included research on deer surviving by eating cedar.
- Several of the nation's best known deer researchers, John Ozoga and Lou Verme, followed Davenport in nutritional and population studies on white-tailed deer.
- Strips cuts and deer browse improvement studies in the 1940's.
- Physiology behavior and nutrition studies continued with a captive deer herd within 640 acres.
- Sharp tailed grouse, snowshoe hare, coyote, muskrat and pine martin were all studied at the research station.

Outside the enclosures, researchers carried out strip cutting food plot experiments on "wild" populations of deer, but by 1963 deer in the area were very few in number. By 1980, most researchers retired or moved on and research slowed at the station. Deer studies in the enclosures became less needed and less funded into the 1980's. In 1996 the last of the deer in the enclosures were released.

The future of Cusino will be based more on research directly out on natural, wild lands and little, if any, within the enclosures. While the research station has seen its heyday come and go, it played an interesting and important role in early game animal population research.

More Information

Verme, L. J. 1994. **The Cusino Wildlife Research Station. A Historical Sketch.** Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Part of a Wildlife Restoration Project W-127-R.