

Replace the director?

A MOVE BY the Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) to oust Illinois Department of Conservation Director David Kenney is not only ill-advised, but it doesn't even add up when one takes a look at the man's record on the job.

Admittedly Dr. Kenney cannot make all groups happy all the time, but Kenney has brought more cohesiveness to the DOC during his less-than-one-year tenure than virtually any director during the past decade.

This is not to say there were not some potentially good directors during that 10 years, but on the other hand look at the records of some who did hold the post. . . almost complete overbalance in certain areas of the conservation endeavor.

Meanwhile, Dr. Kenney has generated enthusiasm and positive action in all phases of the department during the less than one year on the job.

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE pro and con arguments about what are the most important obligations of a department of conservation, and with those beliefs you eventually have the great American democratic system put into action — the ensuing backbiting wounds of a political system, whether they be well-intended or for strictly personal reasons.

FIRST OFF, Dr. Kenney is not a politician, but he works for a politician and he readily admits that Gov. James Thompson is in the driver's seat. But let me tell you something, folks, Jim Thompson has enough things to keep him busy without getting involved in the DOC.

So that leaves Dr. Kenney, an erudite and sensitive man who left a job as a political science instructor at SIU-C, to face the madding crowd on his own.

Kenney quickly caught on to that fact so he started surrounding himself with what he believes are talented men in conservation issues, and in dealing with the public.

Dr. Kenney is not a schooled biologist or a professionally oriented conservationist, but he is an administrator, make no mistake about that, and, he has learned more about Illinois conservation matters in his first year on the job than some men learn in a four-year hitch in the post.

Dr. Edward Kozicky, a member of an advisory board to Kenney, put it this way recently: "I've served on the Illinois Conservation Advisory Board for 13-14 years, and under three previous directors," Kozicky said. "Kenney has been the most outstanding of the four in administration of conservation matters in Illinois."

KOZICKY INDICATED THAT maybe one of the gripes being leveled against Kenney is his attitude toward all areas of conservation.

"Some of our previous conservation directors in Illinois have been more environmentalists and preservationists than conservationists," Dr. Kozicky said. "Maybe that's why these people are upset with Kenney."

But opinions of Dr. Kenney and his department could go on, from both sides and in the middle, forever.

Let's take a look at some of the issues:

The IEC stated in recent news stories that they are disappointed in the "non-consumptive" land use and Kenney's resistance to pressure to develop state-owned natural areas.

These words come on the heels of an announcement by the DOC that it has just completed its Natural Areas Inventory. An inventory, which took 3½ years to complete and which is considered the most comprehensive and thorough cataloging of natural areas produced by any state.

THE INVENTORY REPORTEDLY lists more than 1,000 sites having natural qualities, which make them worthy of preservation. Admittedly these are not necessarily state-owned and the project was started before Dr. Kenney got on the scene, but let's compliment Kenney on his commitment to continue and see the project to its conclusion.

The Illinois Nature Preserves System, is another accomplishment of preservation in Illinois which gained much momentum during the past year.

Heading the list of complaints by the IEC of Kenney's department is the decision to cut some timber in Pere Marquette State Park. This was timber deemed by DOC foresters to not be serving a really useful purpose in that environment and the biologists said that removal would improve the forest.

BUT SIERRA CLUB people, who are members of the IEC and who initiated a suit against the state over the decision, said that, no matter what the trees looked like or even if they were dead or dying, Sierrans wanted them left there.

Sierra officials said in effect, "So what if they do die and drop to the forest floor? Isn't that the natural way?" and who knows, maybe they are right.

We said earlier that no conservation department can please everybody all the time.

But one sidelight to the issue is the fact that the IEC complaint list stated: "The council feels that there is an intrinsic value to areas that have never been touched; once an area has been subjected to cutting the value is lost."

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I suggest IEC people check their facts a bit closer. It's my understanding that Pere Marquette was logged years ago.

In another complaint on the IEC grip list we see: "The Department of Conservation has made no progress in trail development."

We are not sure just what IEC means by the term "progress" but we would refer them to an announcement by the DOC Oct. 27 setting spring of 1978 as the time of a Trails Symposium for launching a major trail-planning program.

That precedent-setting meeting will be held just a bit longer than one year after Kenney came into the director's job.

Just in case IEC is not aware of what this meeting is being held for, the basics are: inventory existing and potential trail sites, including utility corridors, abandoned railroad rights-of-way, levees, river corridors, and other public lands throughout the state.

Another focal point is investigating the feasibility of establishing a statewide trail system and involving the public, along with state, federal and local government agencies in identifying and planning for trail related recreation needs.

BUT ARGUING CONSERVATION issues is another lengthy task, which can't be completed in this column.

And here's the bottom line:

After years of following DOC happenings, we are getting that gut feeling again — who does the IEC have standing in the wings waiting for Kenney's job?

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