

# Working at Fish Camp

A job at Fish Camp in McFarland was not for the lazy or faint of heart. A former crewmember summed up life at Fish Camp as “8-10 gnarly guys with chest waders, suitable clothing, tough skin, hands weathered by days of being wet, cold, and stressed in leaky gloves, fingers thickened and callused from working in the cold, and with less than a full deck—otherwise why would they even think of this as a winter profession?”

## HARD WORK REWARDED

Working 5½ days a week no matter the weather, Fish Camp crewmembers made a decent wage. Many fish camp workers around the state later became fisheries employees for the Conservation

Department and its successor, the Department of Natural Resources.

## GOOFING AROUND

A favorite recreation was the card game euchre. “Riding the keg” was far more dangerous and daring. During winter seining, workers cut ice blocks to reach open water. A truck pulled out the blocks, sometimes with a rider aboard—when the camp foreman wasn’t looking, of course.



Above: Pulling in the lead line on Lake Kegonsa, November 1934. Above right, top to bottom: Moving carp from holding pen to fish box. Barge pulling in seine on Lake Waubesa, motor-driven winch in middle of boat. Removing carp by seine net from holding pen for shipment, Lake Kegonsa. All photos courtesy of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

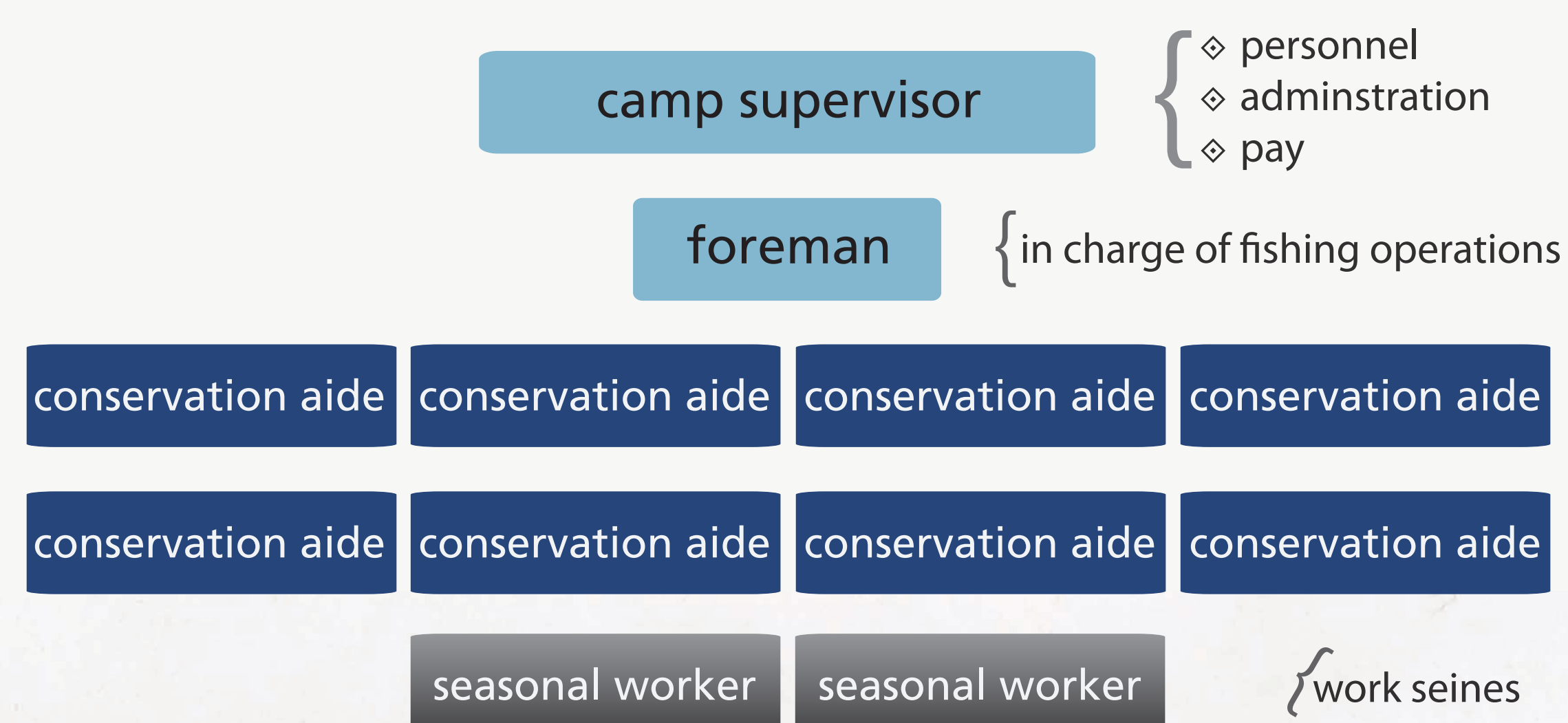
## ? KNOW MORE about the Corn House

The **Corn House**, like the **Net House**, was built in 1937 by the WPA (Works Progress Administration, a depression-era federal work program). The Corn House earned its name because milk cans of kernel corn were stored here. The corn fed carp in the holding pond until the fish were sold.

Often a netman—staying in camp to repair seine nets—fed the carp. He also had to make sure they had enough oxygen, a common problem on hot summer days or when the water was still.

Fish Camp’s third main building, a metal building containing a garage, office and small bunkroom, stood near the parking lot entrance. It was taken down when Fish Camp closed.

## FISH CAMP JOBS *and*



## WHAT THEY DID

- ◇ catch fish year-round
- ◇ travel to other lakes and rivers to harvest fish
- ◇ sort and return sport fish to lake
- ◇ feed corn to carp in holding pen
- ◇ load fish into trucks
- ◇ transport carp to railroads in Madison, Janesville
- ◇ maintain seine nets
- ◇ repair equipment and vehicles
- ◇ patch waders, other personal gear
- ◇ play card games in spare time

## IN THEIR WORDS carp scales, tar and netmen

« [The experience] was great. I was a little embarrassed, though, because I was dating at the time—my future wife. I’d go over to their house after loading fish on Saturday and I’d be full of carp scales. I had to clean up first. But I could never get rid of the tar in my fingernails. [Nets were tarred to last longer.] »

« When you became a netman, your salary, of course, came up, it was very rate dependent. Because when you’d pull seines in the lake you’d run across obstructions and sometimes tear huge holes half the size of this room. This had to be repaired. »