

It is stated that "three-fourths of Westland is untouched as regards timber," and that the total quantity available both on private and Crown lands is 6,776,300,000 superficial feet, covering an area of 2,183,358 acres, or an average of 3,104 superficial feet per acre. Particulars as to the southern portion of Nelson are not at present available.

It must be remembered that a very large proportion of the West Coast is very inaccessible—narrow valleys with steep, shingly hillsides—from whence it is impossible to remove timber at remunerative rates; while as the mountains are ascended the timber decreases in size, and over 4,000 ft., there seems to be no arboreal vegetation.

In these deep valleys, and on the lands above 2,000 ft. altitude, it would be a fatal mistake to allow timber to be removed. It is not the actual removal of mature trees which is to be feared, but the wholesale destruction that inevitably follows. In felling trees the tops and branches are left to rot or burn, to remove the timber tracks are necessarily opened out, and are made use of by cattle which destroy and keep down undergrowth, the thin coating of vegetable deposit is gradually washed away, and in time nothing is left but barren hillsides, from which the rain-water pours off to swell streams and rivers, with disastrous effects to the lower valleys.

None the less important is the clearing of forests along the banks of rivers, as is at present proceeding north of Inangahua Junction, on the Buller River. Here it is evident that the usual chain-reserve regulation is being entirely disregarded, destroying both the magnificent scenery and the natural protection of river-banks against erosion during floods. There is also grave danger to bridges by an accumulation of logs and other *débris* against piles or cylinders, whilst at the mouth of the river (where dredging operations are necessary to keep the bar open) a considerable amount of time and money is annually expended in removing timber brought down from the cleared flats along river-banks.

While on this subject it may not be out of place to draw attention to the disastrous results which will eventually follow the clearing of blackberry along many of the river-banks of Westland, Nelson, and Marlborough. Under the Noxious Weeds Act settlers are compelled to clear their land of this pest; but as in many cases it has entirely supplanted the native vegetation as a protective covering to the banks of streams and rivers, its total eradication will certainly be followed by the loss of valuable lands, while much labour and heavy expenditure will be necessary to prevent further encroachment.

From the foregoing the general conclusions may be summarised:—

(1.) Silver and yellow pine of marketable dimensions are rapidly being cut out, except in (at present) inaccessible situations.

(2.) These pines—the most lasting and durable of all known pines—are being converted into sleepers to the number of at least one million annually, while large quantities are being utilised for other works.

(3.) In recently cut-out areas seedlings are appearing in countless numbers, but owing to fire and stock the majority of these perish.

(4.) That lands on which these pines are chiefly found is absolutely worthless for other purposes.

(5.) That the sources of rivers and streams should be protected from operations by the sleeper-getter.

(6.) Owing to the non-observance of the law in regard to chain reserves along rivers, irreparable damage is being done.

(7.) Only three small timber areas have been declared State forests in Westland, consequently the Conservator of Forests has little control.

The question to be considered is, whether the cut-out forest lands of the West Coast are to be conserved under proper regulations with the object of securing a continuous supply of timber for all time, or are they to remain in their present state—merely as cattle-runs?

Delay in deciding this important matter is fatal to successful results, in this way: Mature trees which supply the necessary seed for the perpetuation of the forest are being rapidly cut out, and it will be too late to think of conserving with a view to natural reproduction when seed-bearing parent trees are all removed, unless transplanting of seedlings is resorted to—an exceedingly costly method compared with natural regeneration.

It is premature to submit proposals for conservation until the main issue is decided, and I earnestly urge that due consideration will be given this important subject at an early date.

#### PLANTATION RESERVES.

In previous reports (1902-3 and 1903-4) attention was drawn to the necessity for setting aside or acquiring lands throughout the colony for plantation purposes.

Every year the demand for land increases, and unless Crown lands are reserved for this purpose in the near future plantation-work must cease in many portions of the colony where nurseries are already established.

In Tapanui district the Department propose resuming four small grazing-runs adjoining Conical Hills Plantation. The total area is 2,622 acres 2 roods 11 poles, while the cost of resumption will be about £750. This will be a sufficient area to maintain the present rate of planting for from six to eight years.

At Maniototo there are only 500 acres available for planting, the remaining numerous plantation reserves being merely narrow strips of land fit for shelter purposes only.

In the Kurow district (where operations are already in progress) there is no land available for planting, but the question of resuming Crown lands now under lease is being considered.

This year's operations will complete the present area at Hanmer Springs, and during the summer it is proposed to remove the present prison-camp to a 500-acre block of Crown lands some two miles further on—adjacent to Jollie's Pass. There are ample and suitable Crown lands in this district, but at present they are leased as runs.