

A difficulty in regard to the resumption of portions of pastoral runs is that the lessees are deprived of the low country for wintering their stock. Unfortunately, however, trees cannot be grown either successfully or profitably at high altitudes, and there is a possibility of curtailing winter country (if acquired for forestry purposes) to such an extent that the remaining portions are unworkable.

In central Marlborough there remains only sufficient land to continue planting operations for two years, while no Crown lands whatever, suitable for plantations, are available for this purpose.

In the far North we have ample State forest reserves, on the Puhipuhi Block, to maintain present output for many years; but the demand for land is so pressing that there is a danger of such reserves being opened for settlement.

Rotorua district is, fortunately, well supplied—indeed, the area available may be said to be practically unlimited.

Adjoining the Waiotapu Plantation it is proposed to ring-fence some 3,000 acres on the block known as Maungakakaramea Reserve, and, later on, to remove the present prison-camp to a central site within this area.

In addition to the districts already mentioned, large areas should be set aside in Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Nelson, Westland, and Southland.

PLANTING OLD-TAILING AREAS.

At the recent mining conference, held in Wellington, the following resolution was carried: "That this conference recommend that old-tailing areas should, where suitable, be planted with forest trees." Officers of the Mines Department indicated a desirable area for experimental purposes near Waitahuna, on the Lawrence branch-railway. This locality was duly inspected and reported on as favourable for tree-growing, and subsequently an area of about 11 acres was selected, fenced, and preparations made to plant same with a variety of forest trees. This work will be completed during the coming spring.

The successful growth of trees on "dredged" areas has already been demonstrated at Waikaka and other places in the Gore district, where larch, spruce, alder, pines, and other trees are thriving amazingly. In considering the question of tree-planting on mining reserves, the possibility of redredging or otherwise reworking of tailings should not be lost sight of. New and cheaper methods of treating large quantities of material are constantly being discovered, and what is at present considered unpayable ground may in time be deemed sufficiently rich for reworking.

Another matter in connection with old tailings deserves special mention. In almost every portion of Otago, Southland, and the West Coast, where dredging or sluicing operations have been in progress for some time, gorse, broom, and other noxious weeds spring up and cover the ground with alarming rapidity. Holders of claims do not seem to be held responsible for the suppression of such growths, but, whether the land is subsequently reworked by dredges or utilised for planting purposes, a heavy expenditure will be involved in clearing and eradicating.

The Department of Mines also suggested an area of 1,000 acres on the Waikaka commonage as suitable for planting. On inspection, however, it was found that, owing to the block being intersected by several roads (which would render fencing an expensive item) and the enormous cost of clearing the area of broom and gorse, it was decided that no action be taken in the meantime.

The Inspecting Engineer, in his recommendations, writes as follows: "The local body does not appear to be doing anything to check the spread of gorse, which is now growing on this reserve; and if something is not done at an early date to check the gorse the seed will be carried down the valley, and lead to considerable areas of land being prejudicially affected."

PRISON LABOUR.

From the reports of the Foresters in charge of the tree-planting by prisoners it will be seen that, on the whole, this class of work has been satisfactory.

At Hanmer Springs, Dumgree, and Waipa (Whakarewarewa) Prison-camps the Forester in Charge personally directs planting operations; but at Waiotapu Plantation instructions have been issued that the Forester is to communicate his wishes to the Gaoler, who will instruct the warders, the latter directing the prisoners, and that the planting of trees by prisoners at Waiotapu is entirely in the hands of the Justice Department.

THE HARDY CATALPA (*CATALPA SPECIOSA*).

The numerous inquiries for information in regard to this tree call for some remarks on the experience of the Department. During the spring of 1903 a large number were raised from seed, and by the end of the following autumn these plants had made rapid growth, averaging 9 in. in height. The following spring they were transplanted into nursery-rows, and for about twelve months they remained in about the same state as when transplanted. During the past summer they have made better growth, but the best progress is noticeable where the trees are sheltered and in the lower-lying and damper portions of the ground, but the crop as a whole is unsatisfactory.

The chief cause of failure are unseasonable frosts which are inevitable in this district during the early summer months. A variety of situations were tried—low-lying, moist, dry, and exposed—but the results in all cases were the same. Given an equable climate and a fair amount of natural shelter, I am of opinion that the *Catalpa speciosa* would thrive even on poor soil. The best results, however, are to be got on moderately rich, well-drained land, with an average rainfall and plenty of shelter; without these conditions it is useless to hope for success.

In order to further test its adaptability in various portions of the North Island, it is proposed to supply lots of from 100 to 1,000 trees to settlers at a nominal charge.