

CONDITION OF RESERVES, ETC.

Owing to the prolonged dry season the fire risk in many districts was very high during the summer and autumn months, and unfortunately extensive damage occurred to many reserves in the Marlborough Sounds. In that particular district there is usually a heavy growth of fern, especially on the shady hillsides, and it is common practice on the part of many settlers to fire the fern when dry conditions prevail in the hope that danthonia pasture will eventually become established. Some of the settlers are not always as careful as they might be in the matter, and in dry seasons their fires often spread into the reserves. It has also been noticed that the settlers rarely sow their burns, and consequently the fern soon gains the upper hand again. Thus, the farmer receives little or no profit from his actions, while, on the other hand, irreparable damage may be and often is caused to the adjoining scenic reserves. Some remedy must be found for this state of affairs, as the following record of fire damage in the Sounds district during the past season shows only too clearly :—

The bush on the Ruamoko and Dieffenbach Point Reserves was almost totally destroyed. The Department has been endeavouring to reforest these points for the past ten years, and just as success seemed to be assured fire has made practically a clean sweep of everything.

About 10 acres of bush was destroyed by two fires that encroached on the Kumutoto Reserve. Strenuous efforts, which eventually met with success, were made by the Department to control the fires, and costs totalling £63 13s. 3d. were incurred.

About 60 acres of bush was destroyed on the Stratford Point Reserve. Costs totalling £42 6s. 3d. were incurred in attempting to control the fires on this beautiful reserve.

Fires on the Timahau Reserve, near Havelock, destroyed about 155 acres of bush. Fire-fighting costs in this case were £12 9s.

About 20 acres of bush was destroyed on the Patten's Passage Reserve. In this case the damage was done before any attempt could be made to control the fire.

Fires from adjoining property destroyed about 10 acres of the Ngaruru Reserve, in Tory Channel. The cost of combating the fire was £11 19s.

On the 31st March the Commissioner of Crown Lands was advised that an extensive fire was menacing the Tennyson Inlet Reserve. A fire-fighting party was quickly assembled, and was able to confine the damage to an area of about 50 acres. Costs incurred amounted to £100. This extensive reserve comprises some 10,000 acres of virgin bush, and in view of the exceedingly dry conditions the party is to be congratulated on the remarkable save that was made. It is considered that the forest will recover, and fortunately the damage is not apparent from the sea.

In that portion of the Sounds district within the Nelson Land District the reserve at Bulwer was in grave danger of total destruction, but through the efforts of local residents and visitors the fire was eventually controlled after about 30 acres of bush had been severely scorched. It is hoped that the damaged bush will gradually recover.

No fire damage of any account was reported from other districts.

Apart from the fire damage referred to above, reports generally show that reserves under the control of the Department and those controlled by local bodies and special Scenic Boards are being maintained in a satisfactory manner. The field staff of the Department has made as many inspections as possible, and the honorary Inspectors throughout the Dominion have given valuable assistance. The Department has been greatly heartened in its efforts to preserve and extend the Dominion's scenic reserves by willing assistance given by other Departments, by local bodies and other organizations, and by numerous individual citizens throughout the country.

LEGISLATION.

Section 55 of the Statutes Amendment Act, 1938, provides that any land comprised in a State forest may be declared to be a reserve under the Scenery Preservation Act on the joint recommendation of the Minister in Charge of Scenery Preservation and the Commissioner of State Forests.

For a number of years the State Forest Service has been closely co-operating with the Department in the matter of scenery preservation and has willingly agreed to selected areas of State forest lands being made available for reservation under the Scenery Preservation Act. In the case of permanent State forest areas required for scenic reserves the Service has as a rule arranged to revoke the reservation under the Forests Act, thus permitting the Department to issue Proclamations under the Scenery Preservation Act. In the case of provisional State forest areas, however, special legislation has in the past been necessary to bring such areas under the Scenery Preservation Act, and sometimes when it has been convenient to do so, permanent State forest areas have also been dealt with by special legislation. It was therefore considered desirable, in order to avoid the necessity of including clauses from time to time in the Reserves and other Lands Disposal Bills dealing with cases as they arose, that there should be a general statutory authority permitting State forest areas to be made scenic reserves. General legislation was therefore drafted by arrangement between the two Departments and included in the Statutes Amendment Act. The new legislation was operated during the year in a number of cases, and will be used in all future cases where it is agreed between the two Departments that State forest land should be made scenic reserve.