

PART I.

REPORT of the SUB-COMMITTEE of the WASTE LAND BOARD on SAW-MILL LICENSES, appointed 29th January, 1874.

Reports, 1874:
Otago.

The area of the forests under the administration of this Board is as follows:—

	Acres.
Upper Clutha and Waitaki Districts	26,240
North-Eastern District	59,840
South-Eastern District	392,960
West Coast and Waiau Districts	1,107,840
Wakatipu, unsurveyed and necessarily merely approximate }	
Total	1,586,880

It may be necessary to explain that the area of forest under the administration of the Southland Waste Land Board extends to about 1,070 square miles, or 684,800 acres, but this report confines itself to the former area only. The great masses of forest will be seen to lie in the southern and western districts, the northern and interior being very sparsely supplied with timber.

Since the Colony was founded, it will be seen by the Rangers' reports that of the Public forests 51,262 acres have passed into private hands, of which area 14,654 acres have been destroyed by fire or otherwise; and of the public forests remaining, 12,787 acres have been destroyed by the same means. These officers appear to be unanimous as to the causes of the destruction of the public forests, which may be summarized as the result of carelessness, the burning of grass on runs, and the unregulated operations of wood license-holders.

The causes of the destruction of the forests on private property are the clearing of the land for cultivation, felling of timber for sawing, fencing, and, in the neighbourhood of Dunedin, principally for firewood. These causes are, in the opinion of the Rangers, bringing about a rapid obliteration of this property of the State.

Sufficient indications are given in the reports of the Rangers that active measures cannot be long delayed, but the extent and direction of these require mature and careful consideration, both in reference to the present and future wants of the public. The conditions of the forests also are so varied, and the wants of the people so diverse, that large exceptions can be taken to almost every principle suggested.

The first question that presents itself is, What timber have we? We have, as shown above, one and a half millions of acres. What does this mean in intelligible figures? That is very difficult to answer, and the estimates will be most varied, but we will attempt one.

The forests vary from heavy timber which is found on the low lands, to small scrub found on the ranges, rising to an altitude of 3,500 feet. Intermediately between these there is every variety. Hitherto the heavy timber, for the most part, has been entered, and it probably covers an area of one-third of the whole, *i.e.*, extends over half a million of acres; the remainder being unfit for the sawyer, and being inaccessible, is of no utility to other trades, such as the firewood cutter, fencers, &c. Possibly, however, the extension of railways may at a future period render much available that is now beyond reach. The question then reduces itself to the quantity and value of the timber on half a million acres, and on these points we also find great differences of opinion. The saw-millers that we have consulted agree that not more than 8,000 superficial feet of marketable stuff can be, on an average, taken out of an acre of what is classed as heavy bush. Yet the estimates of others outside of the trade rise as high as 30,000 feet superficial. We are bound, however, to take the estimates of the most experienced. Half a million of acres, at 8,000 feet per acre, therefore, may be held to contain four billions of superficial feet, which, placed in the market at 10s. per 100 superficial feet, would amount to £20,000,000. This is evidently not the value of the timber as it stands, but after it, in the course of years, has been brought to market. The sum, therefore, represents only the amount of labour which will be required to bring it to market, and the earnings in capital and machinery combined with the above. In other words, the forests, under the administration of the Board, now and in future years, will give employment to capital and labour to the above amount if properly conserved.

But are the estimates of the saw-millers correct? We have no reason to think otherwise as regards their own trade, and the report of Mr. Innes gives confirmatory evidence of this, when he says of the Wakatipu forests, "Unfortunately the wood is subject to rot in the centre of the tree, which renders the proportion of timber suitable for sawing purposes in the forest very limited;" and he instances that a saw-mill of 12-horse power has used up all the available timber in an area of 1,600 acres in ten years; that is, on the saw-millers' estimate, 12,800,000 superficial feet. Now, allowing the mill to have worked 1,200 hours per annum, its out-turn would be not far from this, *viz.*, 10,800,000 superficial feet.

On this information, then, we have a basis to calculate the proportion of forest actually economized by millers, and what is left or goes to waste. With this view, one of our members measured the actual quantity on an acre of average heavy bush, and found the trunks alone to contain 12,748 cubic feet, equal to 152,976 superficial feet, supposing all used up. Thus it will appear that only $\frac{1}{10}$ of the actual bulk of the trunks in an Otago forest is available for saw-millers.

Again, if trunks be considered to measure the same as the stumps and branches, $\frac{1}{10}$ only