

of fire emergencies. It was a reassuring sight to air observers to see trucks converging on to the scene of the fires within a few minutes of the locations being radioed to Kaingaroa and other fire headquarters.

45. *Fire Districts.*—Fire districts to a total of 71 have now been constituted, containing an aggregate area of 4,834,618 acres. During the year three new fire districts were set up—viz., Rotoehu Fire District, 38,700 acres, in the Bay of Plenty district, for the protection of State forest (closed season, 1st October to 15th April); Granville Fire District, 32,000 acres, in the Westland district, for the protection of State forest (closed season, 1st August to 30th April); and Whakatane Fire District, 161,000 acres, in the Bay of Plenty district, for the protection of an exotic forest owned by a company (closed season, 1st October to 15th April).

The coverage afforded by the Kaingaroa Fire District (573,000 acres) was found, during the period of extreme fire hazard experienced in the Taupo district in February, to be inadequate for the protection of all the area in danger, and in the absence of power to declare a "fire emergency district," in which the lighting of fires outside for any purpose whatsoever would be prohibited, there was no alternative but to extend the fire district in question in order to cope with the situation. The extension was effected in the usual way by simultaneously revoking the original notice constituting the Kaingaroa Fire District and declaring a new fire district to be known as the Kaingaroa-Rotorua Fire District, covering 1,340,000 acres (closed season, 1st October to 15th April).

Fire districts are constituted under section 27 of the Forests Act, 1921–22, as amended by section 5, Forest Amendment Act, 1925, which states, *inter alia*, that "the Minister may, by notice in the *Gazette*, on the recommendation of the Director and the Land Board of the district, declare any area to be a fire district." In the case of an emergency, however, the procedure involves too long a delay and envisages a pre-determined plan rather than immediate declaration when a crisis occurs. In the February crisis immediate action was fortunately possible owing to the Land Board being then assembled for its usual monthly meeting, and, with the co-operation of the Under-Secretary for Lands, arrangements were made for the Board urgently to give its recommendation and thus facilitate immediate gazetting of the requisite notices. The coverage now afforded by fire districts in the region extends roughly from Lake Taupo on the south to the Bay of Plenty in the north and from the Waikato River on the west to the Rangitaiki River on the east.

An aerial survey of the Taupo district when the emergency was at its height revealed numerous fires burning over a very wide area, leaving no doubt that total prohibition of lighting fires outside for any purpose whatsoever is imperative under such conditions. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, it now appears imperative that legislative authority should be given to declare a "fire emergency district" in times of high fire hazard. Many requests have been received from local interests to have the fire-district laws enacted for the protection of forested areas extended to other rural areas, and this matter is being examined, together with the general question of fire prevention and control. The whole position is at present the subject of discussion among interested State Departments, with a view to establishing a Dominion-wide fire-fighting and fire-control service, and it is hoped that legislation necessary to set up such a service will shortly be submitted to the Government for consideration.

The fact that no losses were suffered on the huge Kaingaroa State Forest during the critical period of the Taupo conflagration, although fires actually reached the boundary of the forest, is evidence of the smooth and efficient functioning of the departmental fire-fighting organization for the purpose for which it was originally designed, the protection of State forest. The widely expanded duties it was required to perform by way of organizing the general fire-fighting throughout the district menaced by fire were discharged with great merit by the responsible personnel, and, whilst it was undoubtedly effective in preventing a very much worse disaster, there appears to be a real need for some formally organized fire-fighting establishment which can be promptly brought into action in any such emergency, and the proposed legislation now being prepared will make provision accordingly.