

15. The forestry fire-protection organization was totally inadequate to meet an emergency on the scale experienced. The fire-engine stationed at Taupo appears to have done some excellent work in the scrub areas in the immediate vicinity of the town during the early part of the summer and it was undoubtedly most effective for dealing with fires in the town. It was simply overwhelmed when the fires got out of hand in the later stages. The State Forest Service had only four similar machines available at the time in the district, and these had to be reserved for the protection of the Kaingaroa Forest. Heavy demands were made on the man-power and manual equipment resources of the State Forest and the forestry companies. Long hours were also worked by local residents, by men from the public-works camps on the Waikato River, and by men of the Armed Services sent from Waiouru and other Stations. All efforts were unavailing to prevent the spread of the waste-land fires under the conditions existing, and, in all, some 30,000 acres of exotic forest was destroyed. Exact information is not available at present since all accounts have not been rendered, but it appears that at the height of the emergency more than 2,500 men were employed and that the cost of operations will considerably exceed £50,000.

Fire Service and Forest Fires

16. The emergency has directed major attention to the question of forest-fire protection. It demonstrated that prevention is the only effective method of control. It is clear that, particularly in this type of country, every uncontrolled fire must be regarded as dangerous in the fire season, and during periods of low humidity every fire in the open. A number of conferences have since been held and a draft "Rural and Forest Fires Bill" has been prepared. This is mainly aimed at control of fires in the early stages so as to lessen the danger of emergency conditions arising. It is recognized, however, that a recurrence of forest fires on a large scale is still a possibility not only in the Taupo-Rotorua area, but also in other exotic forests, and that the legislation for both urban and rural fire control must be drawn so as to provide for the maximum co-operation between the Fire and Forest Services. It has been decided that the Forest Service will provide and operate all requisite manual and mobile equipment, while the Fire Service will be responsible for the maintenance and operation of heavy equipment such as large pumps and overland hose. It is agreed that the number and distribution of emergency appliances is at present inadequate. The recommendation has been made to Government that a further thirty small hose-laying appliances suitable for either road or cross-country work should be supplied to the Fire Service and issued to brigades at strategic locations in relation to forest fire-protection requirements throughout the Dominion. The response expected of the Fire Service is in three stages—

- (1) Where small forest or herbage fires are involved, the authorized officer may call on one or more adjacent brigades to supply pumping appliance and crew. The duty requirements will not normally exceed those of building fires in rural areas.
- (2) Where more serious fires occur or where the climatic conditions are likely to produce a minor or local emergency, call may be made on brigades over a wider area, the service requirements being a period not exceeding twenty-four hours. This is the maximum service to be expected of volunteer brigades and in some cases it may be necessary to reduce the numerical strength of the crews.
- (3) Where fires occur over a large area or threaten to get out of hand, or where specially hazardous climatic conditions exist, as during the Taupo fires, the Fire Service may be required to give prolonged active or standby service. The call will in this case be on the permanent staffs of the larger brigades.