

districts are in the initial process of being constituted. A summary follows showing the number of districts controlled by the various Fire Authorities and the forest areas which are protected :—

Fire Authority.		Number of Fire Districts.	
Commissioner of State Forests		45 gazetted and 4 pending.	
Rural Fire Committees		6 gazetted and 2 pending.	
Local bodies		11 gazetted.	
Fire districts protecting—			
State forests		39	
Watershed reserves		6	
Private forests administered by Rural Fire Committees	..	5	
Private forests owned by or vested in local bodies	..	5	
Development areas administered by other Government Departments		4	
National parks and an endowment		3	
Crown and Maori land administered by Rural Fire Committee		1	

One also includes a national park.

Before an Order in Council constituting a fire district is issued, the Minister is required to advertise the proposals in a newspaper circulating in the locality and deposit a plan and notice setting out the proposals for public inspection ; any person affected is given one month in which to lodge an objection. Any objection received is considered by the Minister or by some person appointed by him, and if it is not well grounded the Order in Council is issued. Ten objections were lodged against the constitution of the various rural fire districts, but there is only one which has not been settled. This objection concerns the Waipori Rural Fire District, administered by the Dunedin City Council as the Fire Authority, but it is anticipated that satisfactory arrangements will be made and the district constituted before the next fire season.

Following the expiry on 18th November, 1948, of the period during which fire districts constituted under other Acts continued in force unless reconstituted under the Forest and Rural Fires Act, 1947, forest-fire prevention and control throughout the Dominion now comes under the provisions of the latter Act, except State Forests, which are not protected by rural fire districts. Such State forests, as hitherto, are administered under the Forests Act. Under the principal Act there was no provision for the administration of areas not controlled by County Councils, but this has been remedied by an amendment authorizing adjoining Fire Authorities or a Conservator of Forests to exercise control over such areas. Another defect revealed in the principal Act is the absence of power for a Fire Committee of a rural fire district to borrow money to meet expenses in the event of an emergency. This is a necessary provision and is favourably recommended for amending legislation. The Act will for the first time be in full force and effect during the 1949-50 fire season, and the rapid progress made in the reconstitution of fire districts ensures that practically all areas of high fire hazard will be covered by its provisions.

It is regretted, however, that mention must be made of the tardiness of certain commercial forest interests in making the necessary preliminary arrangements to have the provisions of the Act applied to the protection of their forests ; they rather appear to be depending on the consequential protection afforded by adjoining Fire Authorities. It is a basic principle of the Act that an owner is required to accept responsibility for the physical protection of his property. It is therefore imperative to have complete coverage and co-ordination in districts embracing a number of owners, and all owners must accept their share of the responsibility. Consequently, in certain instances it may be necessary to apply the provisions of the Act without further prolonged delay to ensure that the administrative machinery is in force during the next fire season.