

REPORT BY THE COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS, WESTLAND, IN CONNECTION WITH CIRCULAR
No. 507, PRESERVATION OF NATIVE FOREST.

A (Climatic), including Objects Nos. 1 to 3.

1. In this densely timbered district it is hardly necessary to conserve the forest lands covering the upper watersheds of rivers and streams to insure the maintenance of water-supplies; nor, apart from bush fires, is there any likelihood of these regions becoming deforested. Owing to the mild humidity of the climate, whenever a landslip takes place in the upland or lowland valleys, within a few years the scar is covered with luxuriant greenery, chiefly lace-bark and fuchsia, and these flowering deciduous trees lend a most pleasing variety to the adjoining shaggy forest. And thus, all over the inland and coastal bush-clad hill-sides there are numberless streaks of young forest which once were bare patches of rock-slides. Even in the higher valleys the confused, rock-strewn slopes and all the moving shale fans are sooner or later arrested and covered with rata and other alpine trees. There have therefore been no efforts made in the direction of attaining object No. 1.

2. With an average rainfall of 115 in. per annum (much heavier even amongst the hills) there has arisen no sufficient cause to preserve the forest "to insure the gradual distribution of rainfall," or to maintain the climatic equilibrium; nor has anything been done to protect the native flora and fauna, save regulations connected with acclimatisation, &c. Our Westland Society has made Mahinapua Lake and Creek a refuge for birds, and no gunning is permitted.

3. Again, nothing has been done for "the prevention of the degradation of the surface of the mountains and high hills and the deposit of detritus in the valleys."

B (Scenic), including Objects Nos. 4 and 5.

4. To preserve scenic effect and shelter in the low country the Land Board has set apart reserves near Lake Ianthe and adjoining the terminals of the Franz Joseph and Fox Glaciers. In the preservation of the forest and scrub along the rivers to maintain their banks, a special Act, "The Mahinapua Creek and Lake Reserves Act, 1893," was passed in connection with the margin of Mahinapua Creek and Lake. The Crown Lands Ranger and the roadman have particular instructions to prevent any unnecessary destruction of the forest bordering the main roads. The Land Board has always insisted upon a road reserve of 2 chains or more in width along the banks of rivers and lakes and of 1 chain on the margins of the large streams. On the Grey and other rivers small reserves have been made with this object in view, but beyond this nothing has been done in the direction indicated.

5. Connected with the "reservation of forest-clad gorges and other places of natural beauty," only one area between the Otira and Bealey has been set apart for the purpose of a National Park (see *Gazette* No. 46, 9th May, 1901, page 1026).

As instructed, I would suggest the following reservations of the forest lands in this district:—

(1.) A reserve covering the higher portions of the hummocky ridge known as the Twelve Apostles, between the townships of Cobden and Point Elizabeth. A reserve including the high bush-clad range from Greymouth southward beyond Kakawau Trig. These "to insure the maintenance of water-supplies," and also from a scenic point of view. The denudation of these hills is gradually creeping upward, and if not checked in a few years there will be merely bleak tops and slopes overhanging the towns in the place of the lovely backgrounds of exuberant forest which now exist. These limestone ranges are also the habitat of large numbers of trees, plants, and ferns wholly peculiar to the localities—that is, to this district. A portion of the area is within Native Reserve No. 31, but no doubt arrangements could be made for this reservation.

(2.) "To insure the gradual distribution of rainfall and to maintain the climate-equilibrium," I do not consider that any reservations are required; but "to protect the native flora and fauna" I would advocate stern measures with regard to the lighting of fires in the alpine scrub and grass lands, especially along any of the transinsular tourist routes. About twenty years ago scrub, grass, and flora in Arthur's Pass were almost swept bare by fire, and the smaller shrubs, &c., are only partially recovering now. Of course, the bulk of the beautiful alpine forest was destroyed for good. A few years ago the grand beech forest that coated the range behind the Bealey Township was virtually wiped out by fire, and now there is left simply a bleak, blistered hillside dotted with blackened stumps and logs. A favourite outing from Hokitika is to go to the summit of Mount Tuhua, to which a tourist track has been made through the timber at considerable expense, and one of the first parties who went up fired the hill-top, thus destroying and ravaging the flora and mountain forest for many years to come. Years ago when I visited the upper Rakaia Valley, in Canterbury, the mountain-flanks and river-flats were beautified by patches of timber and shrubs tenanted by numerous small birds. Now, I am told, the whole region has been scarified by fires lit purposely by a sheep-farmer who, after some years of fruitless experiment, has abandoned the place. The revenue derivable from the lease of such country and the advantages from a settlement point of view are so small that valleys so situated should be reserved for scenic purposes and for the protection of native and imported fauna.

There is another aspect of vandalism in connection with this subject, and that is the wholesale pilfering of alpine flora from Arthur's Pass. For twenty years hardly a coach passes through but some of the passengers root out some dozens of the flowers which grow alongside the road, and this is further aggravated by the numerous picnic parties who come in covered vans and wagons, encamp in the pass, and carry back huge loads of plants. In Switzerland no tourist is allowed to meddle with the alpine flora, because it was found that, ere long, these lovely alpine meadows would have been cleaned right out. Now that we have a National Park, including this pass, special measures can be taken for the preservation of its flora.