

For example, in North Auckland where the fire risk, particularly in connection with the kauri forests, is normally high during the summer months, the constant rainfall eliminated all danger, while in the southern and eastern part of the province a very high risk obtained.

Again, in Rotorua and northern Wellington Districts the fire danger for the greater part of the summer was not abnormal and the same might be said in regard to Nelson during the latter part of the summer; on the other hand Canterbury had a different experience. There an exceptionally long spell of dry weather—it continued practically from November to March—created a very high fire hazard at Balmoral and Eyrewell State forests, although Hanmer Forest was not so badly affected, thanks to frequent and heavy rain showers. In Westland and Southland, too, the last five months of the year were very dry. The fire hazard created by the dry summer of the South Island was accentuated by the fact that the spring was wet and early, so that a rank growth of herbage was induced, which provided much inflammable material.

In view of what has been said it is all the more gratifying to record that the losses from fire were exceedingly small. In Auckland the only fire of any consequence occurred in a State forest in Thames District. Fires in this forest appear to have been lighted deliberately in no fewer than twelve places, and before all danger was past about 30 acres of cut-over bush and fern were burned. Although police inquiries were made sufficient evidence could not be obtained to warrant Court proceedings.

A small fire swept some 4 acres of bush workings in Omahuta forest, North Auckland, and several other fires occurred in fire districts where settlers were “burning off” without permission. As an illustration of the difficulty experienced in obtaining convictions in such cases, one instance is cited where legal proceedings were taken and, notwithstanding that the offender pleaded guilty, the presiding Justices of the Peace declined to enter a conviction and dismissed the charge on payment of £3 3s. 6d. Court expenses. Such an unusual course was freely commented on in the press, and it is hoped that the publicity thus gained will act as a deterrent to others. In Rotorua Region no fires took place in the exotic forests, and only one small one in an indigenous forest, when about 10 acres of young native growth and fern were destroyed. In Wellington Region the record is not so good; here, in all, eight fires occurred, and the most serious one scorched about 175,000 ft. board measure of standing timber; fortunately, however, it has been possible to sell this stand as salvage timber. (Two of these fires could be traced to sparks from railway locomotives and two or three others to fires on private land getting out of control.) The most serious loss from fire in Nelson Region was the destruction of 40 acres of unmerchantable forest. Some other fires entered State forests, but the damage done was negligible.

In Canterbury, the weather conditions notwithstanding, no fires were reported in State forests, but several settlers' fires were responsible for some serious losses on private lands.

A few small fires were reported from Westland Region; the only one of any consequence burned 31 acres of exotic and indigenous forests before it could be extinguished, but the loss was not serious.

Southland also had a favourable fire report; only one fire entered State forest, during the course of which about 150 acres of old workings were burnt.

2. FIRE DISTRICTS.

The total number of forest fire districts constituted under the Forests Act and its amendments is now forty-six, and the area covered by these districts aggregates approximately 2,546,600 acres.

During the past twelve months two new private fire districts were constituted—viz., Waitangi (North Auckland), 12,100 acres, and Korokoro (Wellington), 2,500 acres.

It has taken several years to educate the general public to a realization of the value of fire districts as a means of preventing indiscriminate fire lighting and “burning off” except under expert supervision, but that this is gradually being recognized is given point to by the fact that fire districts constituted in the interests of local bodies and private companies now number ten.

The system continues to work smoothly and has undoubtedly contributed in no small measure to the comparative freedom from serious forest fires in State forests which has been the fortunate lot of the Dominion for almost the past decade. Its weakness is the difficulty, as in all fire-preventive matters, of obtaining acceptable evidence against those who infringe the fire law. When to this are added circumstances such as those already cited—viz., the dismissing of a charge against an offender who admits guilt—the law becomes almost impossible of enforcement.

3. FOREST PROTECTION AGAINST HERBIVOROUS ANIMALS.

A vigorous campaign against grazing and browsing animals in State forests was pursued by Forest Service workmen throughout the year and resulted in the known destruction of a grand total of 78,422, as against 48,000 for 1933. The total cost of this work was £4,275 (last year £3,250). Particulars of the kill are as follows: Rabbits and hares, 77,421; deer, 506; pigs, 74; horses (Kaingaroa Plains, Rotorua Region), 95; opossums (Westland and Southland), 315; and stoats, 11.

Rabbits were most troublesome in Rotorua, Canterbury, Nelson, and Southland Conservancies in that order; the total amount spent on rabbit-killing was £4,115, but portion of this sum will be recoverable from the sale of skins.

Throughout the year the Service co-operated closely with the Department of Agriculture in an endeavour to cope more adequately with the rabbit nuisance. That Department is charged with the administration of the Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1928.