

Special Report of Superintendent of Forests.

ALBANY, N. Y., *December 6, 1899.*

To the Fisheries, Game and Forest Commission, Albany, N. Y.:

GENTLEMEN.—In compliance with a request from your honorable Board I respectfully submit here some suggestions as to an increase in the working force of the Forestry Department in order to secure better results in the care and management of the Preserve, and greater efficiency in the protection of our forest areas, both public and private.

First of all, because of its importance and necessity, I would respectfully renew the recommendation which I made in a preliminary report of the Commission, transmitted to the Legislature, January 20, 1899, which was as follows:

“Although, in the management of the Forest Preserve the last year, the forest fires have been less in number and in area than at any like period since the establishment of the Forestry Department, I believe that the damage from this source can, under proper arrangement, be still further minimized, and, perhaps, entirely prevented. To this end a more compact and systematic organization of the corps of firewardens is necessary. The various duties of the Superintendent of Forests will not permit him to give the attention to this branch of the service which he would like, and which the safety of the forest demands. He suggests the appointment of an assistant who shall be designated as the supervisor of firewardens, or chief firewarden, and whose time and services shall be devoted exclusively to the proper organization, supervision and direction of the firewardens, of whom there are 187 in the forest towns, not including the district wardens; or over 700, including the latter. This official, in the course of his duties, would have the opportunity of visiting the place where each fire occurred, and making a proper examination as to its cause, extent and damage, and to institute whatever prosecution might be necessary for a violation of the Fire Law. He should see that in each case the warden fills out his blank report, and that it states all the facts connected with the fire. He should scrutinize the bill of each warden for the services of the posse ordered out, and see that the number of men charged for and other items are correct. He should have

supervision of the bills rendered by the various towns against the State in reimbursement for half of the expenses paid by them for the extinction of forest fires, as now provided by law. By careful attention to the latter requirement, a competent official would save to the State a sum more than double his salary. Furthermore, in fulfillment of the requirements of the law, he should see that whenever a vacancy occurs in the list of firewardens that the place should be promptly filled by recommending some person who has not only had experience in fighting fire, but, also, one who will command the respect and obedience of a posse of fellow citizens when it is necessary to order them out to fight fire. In further compliance with the requirements of the Fire Law, he should see that every forest town is properly divided into small districts, and a district firewarden, properly located, appointed in each. During his spare time, while at the Albany office, he should prepare maps of each town showing the subdivision into fire districts. He should, also, attend to the distribution among the firewardens of the printed notices containing the rules and regulations of the Forestry Department in relation to the prevention and extinction of forest fires, and should see that these notices are thoroughly and properly posted throughout the woodland districts of the Adirondacks and Catskills.

"During the winter, when not busy in adjusting the annual accounts, he should spend his time in traveling about through the various towns, visiting each firewarden and district firewarden in order to see that everything is fully organized and ready for fighting the spring fires."

In this connection I would again urge that the surest way to decrease the number of forest fires is through the prompt and vigorous prosecution of the persons to whose criminal carelessness so many fires are due. When, in each locality, some of these offenders have been fined or jailed, then the fires from such causes will cease, and not until then. A chief firewarden, if appointed, would follow up each fire and ascertain the cause. If it started through carelessness or willful neglect in burning fallows or abandoned camp fires, he would institute the necessary legal proceedings. As it is now, the firewardens are afraid to report the cause of the fires in their district. Too often, through fear of their neighbors, they report "Cause unknown." There should be no difficulty in ascertaining where a fire started; and it requires but little effort or intelligence to ascertain the cause.

In short, a regiment might as well be sent into service without an officer, as to expect that the large force of firewardens can attain any degree of proper efficiency without some directing head.

If through the necessary legislation the Superintendent can be provided with an assistant, who, under his direction, will devote his time wholly to the supervision of

the firewardens and prosecutions of violations of the law, I am confident that the forest fires in our State can be reduced to the lowest possible minimum.

I would embrace this opportunity also to call attention to the urgent need of some efficient system for patrolling the Adirondack and Catskill forests. To this end I would suggest the organization of an adequate force of forest rangers who should be assigned to districts of a suitable area, which should be patrolled constantly and thoroughly. The few game protectors on duty in the Adirondacks cannot attend to this kind of work. One man cannot patrol an entire county.

The value of patrol service was strikingly exemplified this last summer, at the time of the numerous fires which, owing to an extraordinary drought, occurred then. Although one-third of the Adirondack forest is owned or controlled by private clubs, or held as private preserves, not one fire occurred on these lands, because this territory was thoroughly and efficiently guarded. On the million acres, or thereabouts, owned by the private preserves there are about ninety-eight patrols. Surely the State with its greater acreage should have some such kind of a force, even if not so numerous.

Each ranger or patrol should be assigned to some particular township for his district. The average Adirondack township is about seven miles square. The ranger should be required to live on the township, and a log cabin should be built for that purpose near the center of the township. He should live in the woods, not in some distant village. During dry seasons the highways should also be patrolled because more fires start at a roadside than anywhere else.

The duties of a patrol are different from those of a firewarden. The firewarden's work commences *after* the fire has started; the work of the patrol, *before*. The best way to fight fire is to have no fire; and there will be very few fires in woods that are thoroughly watched. The patrol would follow each camping party, and all hunters or fishermen, to see that the "coffee fires" are extinguished; and he would keep a sharp watch on any skulker who might be a possible incendiary. In winter time he would see that no timber was stolen and hauled off from State land; also that no deer were killed by "crusting." Every snowshoe track would be followed, and the reason for it ascertained.

The rangers or patrols by their mere presence in the woods would contribute greatly to the protection of fish and game. No poacher would attempt to operate on a township where there was a ranger. These rangers would also report all violations of the Game Law, and these reports would be turned over to the Chief Fish and Game Protector for prosecution. This force of rangers, if numerous enough, should be under the charge of some official who, in addition to other field work, should see

that each man was always on his district and attending to his duties. Such official could be designated as the assistant superintendent or as an inspector.

In the way of further suggestion I would respectfully call attention to the constant need of statistics and information relating to the acreage and classification of the woodlands in the Preserve, and in the Adirondack Park as well. It is difficult to understand the real forestry situation in Northern New York without having some tabulated figures which will show not only the acreage, but also the amount of virgin forest, lumbered land, burned or waste areas, and water surfaces, lot by lot and town by town. No correct estimate can be formed of our forest resources or future timber supply until the remaining area of virgin forest is accurately determined. About eleven years ago I made a careful tabulation of figures showing these facts, based on information gathered from the assessment-rolls, in which each lot is fairly well described; but the forest has changed so much under the lumbering operations of the past ten years, combined with the great development in the wood-pulp industry, that the figures have ceased to be of much value.

Moreover, the land list or schedule of lots in the Forest Preserve, which forms the basis of our entire work, should be compiled annually instead of at long intervals. In order that the statistics relating to these various matters and to the annual output of the mills may be prepared and furnished for the information of all concerned, it seems advisable that some provision should be made for the appointment of a clerk who should have charge of the land and tax records. He should also have some skill in drafting in order to prepare and care for the many maps which are in daily use in the course of the office work. The 1,200,000 acres of forest land owned by the State involves a large amount of real estate work, as well as forestry. The question of taxes and titles is no small one, and the Superintendent should have some clerk to attend to it. If an individual or a corporation owned a vast estate like the Forest Preserve, there would not only be one clerk but many employed to look after the records pertaining to so much real estate. The Forestry Department at Washington, without any land under its charge, employs twenty or more clerks on forest statistics.

As a further recommendation I would respectfully suggest the advisability of the Commission doing something in the line of scientific, practical forestry. Although the forestry clause in the new Constitution prohibits the cutting of any timber, there yet remains the important work of reforesting burned or denuded areas, work which can be undertaken and carried on successfully without violating any of the constitutional provisions. From five to ten men under the direction of a competent forester might be employed to advantage in replanting some of the

waste areas of which there are many thousands of acres in the Preserve. It is no answer to this proposition to say that these lands will reforest themselves naturally. True, nature will do this work unaided. But will it reforest the ground with valuable merchantable timber? In forestry, as in farming, the work of nature must be guided and assisted.

If the Legislature will make the necessary provision, there should be an annual appropriation for the care and maintenance of the Forest Preserve, and for the protection of the Adirondack and Catskill forests. This sum should provide for the pay of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and thirty-five rangers; also for a chief firewarden and a land clerk.

These suggestions are based on a lifelong experience in forestry work, the last fifteen years of which have been spent in the Adirondack and Catskill woods, where, in addition to my other duties in connection with the Preserve, I have made a careful, thoughtful study of this entire question.

In conclusion, I want to thank your honorable Board for the opportunity afforded me of making these suggestions. I trust that some of them, if not all, will meet with your approval, and that the Legislature and Governor will provide the necessary means for carrying them into effect.

All of which is respectfully submitted,

WILLIAM F. FOX,

Superintendent State Forests.
