

Canadian Forestry Journal

VOL. VI.

OCTOBER, 1910

No. 3

Forest Fires and Railways

By R. H. Campbell, Dominion Superintendent of Forestry.

The vicinity to a forest of a railway either in construction or operation makes the danger of fires more intense. This is partly due to causes connected with the railway itself, and partly due to the crowds of land-seekers, prospectors, freighters, tramps and other people equipped more or less generally with a fine bump of irresponsibility who accompany or follow it. The record of each year's conflagrations shows the railways well up in the list of the causes of forest fires. If they do not lead they always follow close in the black array. It is of interest, then, to consider the relation of the railways to forest fires. In doing so the subject will be confined to the fires which are due directly to the railways.

Railway Construction.

In the construction of the railway it is necessary that the right-of-way should be thoroughly cleared. If dead tops, limbs and stumps are left scattered over the right-of-way or piled just outside of it, as has usually been done, they become a veritable fire-trap, and the destruction of the surrounding forest is an inevitable consequence sooner or later. The regulations for clearing the right-of-way adopted by the Transcontinental Railway Commission are now being generally followed. They provide as follows:—

“The whole, or as much of the right-of-way as the engineer may direct, shall be entirely cleared of all

trees, logs, brush and other perishable matter; all of which shall be burnt or otherwise disposed of as the engineer may direct, unless specially reserved to be made into timber, ties or cordwood. Unless directed in writing by the engineer, trees and brush must not be thrown on adjacent lands, but must be disposed of on the right-of-way. Trees unavoidably falling outside the right-of-way must be cut up, removed to right-of-way and disposed of.”

But the establishing of a regulation is not the carrying of it out, and in order to ensure the carrying out of such regulations as these thoroughly it is necessary to place a fire patrol along the line of construction. This has been done along the line of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway through Dominion territory west of Edmonton with good results. Fire from the right-of-way has not burned forty acres outside its limits, although the right-of-way has been cleared and burned thoroughly in that district. But the ranger in charge had to use authority and judgment. Some contractors were allowing debris to gather close against the edge of the right-of-way where, when burned, it would lead fire into the forest. These contractors were stopped and made to clear a space between the brush heap and the forests. In the dry and dangerous season of the year the ranger prohibited burning altogether. The engineers of the rail-