

Quebec Curbs the Fire Vandal

THE Government of Quebec on June 7th passed an Order-in-Council closing the forest lands of the province to all save those in possession of a permit. The Minister of Lands and Forests, Honorable Honoré Mercier, stated that the principal reason actuating the members of the Cabinet was the fear that unless some drastic step were taken the fires this year would repeat the terrible record of destruction caused last year. "The fact is" said Mr. Mercier, "that it will take a century of time for the forests of Quebec to recover from the frightful fire losses of last year. That was bad enough and this year so far conditions have not been much better. As a matter of fact, in some sections conditions are actually worse despite the valiant efforts of all the forces arrayed on the side of protection. In one very valuable and important section the burned area comprises no less than one-third of the entire surface. The fire losses represent something like ten million dollars in cash and if you want the equivalent in timber acres it can be set at 800,000. These are simply colossal figures. People do not seem to grasp the significance of this annual orgy of destruction of provincial resources. If they did it would not be necessary to take the steps which we found necessary in the circumstances.

Referring to the conditions under which the closing of the forest lands will be applied the Hon. Minister stated that, now the Government was invested with the right to close the forests, the closure would be applied, not over the whole forests lands at once, but in sections, as the reports of the Forestry Department officials seemed to warrant.

"For example, where it is reported that fires persist in certain sections, the Order-in-Council will be applied at once.

"In this way it is possible that much of the forest lands will be closed at an early date, but on the other hand, the Order-in-Council may be regarded as a Government measure of reprisal as well as prevention, and that in sections where it is reported that care is being exercised and good fire conditions prevail, the closing order will be held in abeyance. Of course, it must be understood that should the circumstances warrant the procedure that the Government can and no doubt will by virtue of the

Order-in-Council passed recently, close the entire forest lands of the Province until such time as conditions improve."

Reverting to a discussion of the causes that led up to the passing of the Order-in-Council, Mr. Mercier stated that during 1921 the number of fires that occurred reached the grand total of 1,124. The department had been making an exhaustive inquiry

into the causes of these fires, and the result showed that only a small percentage of them could be accounted for, the balance being divided among settlers, visitors, campers, sportsmen. The report tabulates the various causes as follows:

Settlers' clearance, 260; railway causes, 199; travellers, 620; divided as follows: drivers 36, explorers 1, guards 2, hunters and fishermen 51, berry pickers 33, vagrants 93, forest employees 23, campers 18, unknown persons 281, divers causes 45.



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