

# Conservation

A monthly bulletin published by the  
Commission of Conservation, Ottawa, Canada.

VOL. V.

SEPTEMBER, 1916

No. 9

## Northern Ontario Fires

**Uncontrolled Settlers' Fires  
Undoubtedly the Cause.  
No Law to Restrict  
Them**

The recent fires in the clay belt of Northern Ontario have, according to recent estimates, caused the loss of probably not less than 250 lives and the destruction of several million dollars worth of property.

This is the greatest catastrophe of the kind, from the point of view of lives lost, that has ever occurred in Canada. The nearest approach was the Porcupine fire, in 1911, in the same district, where 84 lives were lost. So far as records show, only two forest fires have ever occurred on this continent which caused the loss of more lives than the "clay belt" fire of 1916. One was the Peshtigo fire, Wisconsin, in 1871, when some 1,500 people perished. The Hinckley, Minnesota, fire of 1894 caused the loss of 418 lives.

All available evidence indicates that the recent disaster was the result of a large number of settlers' land-clearing fires, which spread rapidly and merged together into several all-consuming holocausts with the almost unprecedented hot, dry spell of the last half of July and the very heavy winds which occurred at that time.

Ontario has no law which restricts in any way the right of the settler to start clearing fires at any time he may see fit. The Act provides only that every reasonable care and precaution shall be exercised in the setting out or starting of clearing fires, and in the management of and care for such fires after they have been set out or started, in order to prevent such fires from spreading. There is no statement of what precautions shall be taken, nor any real provision for the enforcement of this wholly inadequate provision of the law.

In actual practice settlers are at liberty to set out clearing fires whenever they wish; and no fire ranger has any authority to prevent them. It, therefore, naturally follows that the more careless or

reckless settlers select the driest times for such fires.

Unless a radical change is made in the forest protection laws, with adequate provision for enforcement, such disasters may be confidently expected in the "clay belt," at repeated intervals, and

west and in a portion of New Brunswick the setting out of such fires is prohibited except on permit signed by a forest officer. Similar laws should be passed by Ontario. The beneficial effects of such legislation are notable in every province or state where it has been



Cut 137

A part of the area near Kelso swept by the recent conflagration in the "clay belt" of Northern Ontario. Green timber killed but not consumed; ready for another fire. Culverts and corduroy destroyed. Roadway, usually covered with muck soil, partially burned out



Cut 138

What remains of a settler's home in the "clay belt" of Northern Ontario after the terrible fires of July 29 and 30. About 250 lives were lost in these fires and millions of dollars worth of property was destroyed. Such disasters need not be regarded as inevitable. They can and should be avoided, through adequate preventive measures

until the country in process of settlement is swept practically clear of timber.

It is evident that the primary need for the north country is a law regarding settlers' fires. In Quebec, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, the Dominion forest reserves of the

made effective.

At the annual meeting of the Commission of Conservation, in January last, a resolution was adopted urging upon the Ontario government the thorough reorganization of its fire-ranger service.

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## Fire Prevention in Schools

**Early Attention of Teachers  
Required to Safeguard  
Pupils**

The protection of pupils from fire and panic is the first duty of those in charge of schools. Schools will soon be re-opening for the autumn term and the institution of fire drills should be undertaken without delay. The first day of school is not too early for this purpose. Many scholars will be new to the school or, by promotion, will be unaccustomed to their surroundings and, in case of fire or of fire alarm, disastrous results might follow.

In an eastern city, within ten days after the opening of the last school term, two fires occurred, fortunately during the absence of the pupils. In these schools fire drill had been undertaken at the inception of the term. The occurrence of fires so early in the school term, however, demonstrates the necessity of giving first attention to this form of security to pupils.

The principal and teachers should also familiarize themselves with the school building, noting any dangerous conditions for immediate attention.

Accumulations of papers, disused furniture and school supplies are stored in basements and attics and, accentuated by deposits of dust, create serious fire-danger from spontaneous combustion. Chimneys or pipes passing through attics should be carefully inspected for any cracks or defects from which sparks could be emitted.

The care of waste paper is important. Metal waste paper baskets should be used and the contents burned as soon as the baskets are full; under no circumstances should they be allowed to accumulate. The burning should be done in a safe place, away from frame out-buildings or fences, and should be carried out by either the teacher personally or by some reliable senior pupil.

The heating apparatus, be it stove or furnace, should be carefully examined and placed in fire-safe condition.

Ashes should be kept in metal containers and should never be

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