

*S.O. 29*

had been millions of dollars of damage in that immediate area to the forest, to say nothing of the wildlife, the dozens of homes, barns and cottages that were lost.

In Nova Scotia over the weekend, and in the last few days of last week, there were 36 fires, six of which got out of control. The largest was in Guysborough County near Waverly. In Prince Edward Island, there had been some small fires which are now under control. The largest fire was near Antigonish.

I come from an area of the country where fires are a severe problem. As you move west from the Maritimes and Ontario, since April 1 there have been 350 small forest fires, fortunately all of which have been put out without a great deal of damage. It raises some questions this House should be addressing itself to during an emergency debate as to what we should be doing as a country. I will come to that in a moment.

The majority of the fires have been caused by human carelessness, most of them started as brush fires, people burning off grass or brush land, and garbage fires. That raises one of the issues we should be addressing, which is in terms of public education on fire safety itself. I am sure television and radio stations throughout the country would be eager to accept quality, small, to-the-point ads produced by the Canadian Forestry Service or Environment Canada, or by the provinces, that could be put on the air prior to the forest fire season, advising people of the dangers of small brush fires, garbage fires, chimney fires, and so on, and what the effects can be.

It is only in a country so large geographically as ours that we could possibly stand to lose the hundreds of thousands of hectares we lose every year, hundreds of millions of dollars in good standing forests that are lost. In my area and in some areas of Ontario, these fires are simply left to burn themselves out. No serious attempts are made to put them out simply because we have a lot of rural forests we do not yet have under any form of logging or harvesting.

In looking at these kinds of emergency situations, we have to look at some examples of the tragedy which occurs. Ken Banks near Upper Gagetown is an example of how the tragedy only strikes home when you look at what has happened to someone such as him. Mr. Banks, 58 years of age, was employed as a carpenter and a part-time farmer. He lost his century-old family home and all of his farm outbuildings to the fire that started near Gagetown. In Catamaran Provincial Park, 15 cottages were razed. Local wildlife officers flying over could see the moose being burned in the fire, to say nothing of the tens of thousands of birds and small animals that would have perished in these extremely hot and fast moving fires.

On the issue of Gagetown and the military accident, the Associate Minister of National Defence has promised a full investigation on compensation. It raises an issue that requires something further. For someone to have been in charge of that base and to have allowed that kind of high explosive artillery shelling to have been going on when the fire risk was very high raises some very real concerns in my mind about what kind of

safety precautions have been discussed at that base, and perhaps at other bases.

I have touched briefly on the issue of better public education, and I will come back to that in a moment. I want to spend a moment talking about the need for more water and chemical-carrying aircraft. Something this House should look at, both during this debate and in committee, is the need to have a centralized co-ordinated force.

During the last Parliament, there was an opportunity for provinces to enter into a joint financing project between the federal and provincial Governments to provide water bombers that were made here in Canada. I know some provinces participated. My own Province of British Columbia did not fully take advantage of the program as I think it should have. In many, many cases the huge fires that occur in my constituency, which is 750 miles one way and 400 miles across the other, with very few roads going into areas where there are often fires, fighting by helicopter and aircraft is really the only way to adequately fight the fires.

We need to co-ordinate, perhaps through the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forestry Service, a team with state-of-the-art equipment that can link properly into satellite technology, which is now available, infrared photography from high up in the atmosphere indicating where fires are moving, the intensity of the fire, where the nose of the fire is so you can get down and attack it properly with chemicals and water, where you cannot get at it with heavy equipment or ground crews. We need to look at that much more seriously than we have in the past. If we do not learn from these terrible tragedies, they will continue to repeat themselves time after time. We should not forget that a fire as recently as 1961 in the Province of Newfoundland consumed 4 per cent of the land base of that province in huge fires that managed to get out of control.

I call on the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Nielsen) and the Associate Minister of National Defence to take time to draft some kind of optional plan where they can look at the resources available presently in terms of Transport Canada, from people to helicopters, to the Department of National Defence, to various aircraft through the provinces, privately and so on, and come up with a co-ordinated approach.

They do trade equipment. As we have learned in this situation, equipment from Ontario, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Maine, has moved into these areas to assist. Looking over the longer term at the hundreds of millions of dollars in lost forest lands, the enormous amount of wildlife that is damaged and lost, the enormous property loss, I think it is the responsibility of the Government to take a close look at that kind of an approach and bring forward a national plan that is an investment in protecting the country, rather than dealing with it as we have to this point.

A point I have raised many times in this House is the need for a full federal ministry of forests. It was a promise during the last federal election. There is a hard-working Minister