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Christmas Trees and Forest Conservation

The Cutting of Trees for Decoration Has Infinitesimal Effect upon the Timber Supply, and is Justified from Farmer's and Customer's Points of View.

By Clyde Leavitt, Chief Fire Inspector, Board of Railway Commissioners.

Each year, the holiday season brings its crop of suggestions from public-spirited citizens that in the interest of forest conservation the exportation of Christmas trees from Canada to the United States ought to be prohibited, or that the cutting of such trees should be altogether stopped.

This agitation, so far as it exists, is based upon the known fact that our accessible forest resources in the eastern provinces are by no means unlimited, but on the contrary are being rapidly reduced in quantity through fires and lack of adequate regulation of cutting methods, thus seriously threatening the future development of the great lumbering and pulp and paper industries, upon which so much of Canada's prosperity must continue to depend. The argument is advanced that the young growth cut for Christmas trees ought to be left standing, to grow to pulpwood or saw-timber size. There are, however, a number of points which should be taken into consideration in this connection.

Where Most Xmas Trees Come From.

In the first place, the great bulk of Christmas trees cut in Canada for export to the United States are from privately owned lands. In many cases, they are cut from pasture lands upon which the farmers desire to keep down the tree growth in order to maintain the pasture as such. In other cases, trees are cut from swamp areas or muskegs where the growth is very slow, but where growth in the open is favorable to the symmetrical development of the tree, thus rendering it particularly suitable for Christmas tree purposes. In neither of such cases would the prohibition of the exportation of Christmas trees or of their cutting for local use be likely to have any noticeable effect



in the direction of increasing the supplies of material suitable for pulpwood or lumber. To not more than a practically negligible extent are such trees cut from the great areas of timber limits, generally more or less remote, which comprise the areas upon which the lumbering and pulp and paper concerns depend very largely for their supplies of raw material.

It has not been very seriously suggested that residents of Canada should be prohibited the use of Christmas trees. These trees are usually available locally. If, however, exportation to the United States

were to be prohibited, there would be many farmers or other owners of private lands, along the International boundary in Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario, whose market for Christmas trees would be cut off entirely or greatly reduced. It is reasonable to suppose that in such cases serious objection would be raised by them to the action suggested. The selling of Christmas trees affords farmers and others an opportunity for winter work and enables them to realize a certain amount of revenue from the value of the trees, in addition. The systematic growing of trees for pulpwood or lumber involves a long-time element, which makes this usually a matter for Governments or long-lived corporations. In either case, it is a business proposition. There is no reasonable doubt that the farmer can secure a larger net annual revenue from the sale of Christmas trees than would be the case were he required to let the trees grow to sizes suitable for either pulpwood or lumber, quite aside from the fact that he may have good reasons for wanting to get rid of the trees, as well as to realize upon them within his own lifetime. Only in the event of its being obviously necessary in the public interest would such governmental interference with private property be justified as would prevent the farmer from realizing upon his own property in the way which, in his own judgment, offers the best financial return for himself. There does not appear to be any such public necessity involved in this case.

This is the Real Waste.

As a matter of fact, the waste in connection with pulpwood and saw timber operations in all our forests outweighs many thousand times over, any possible loss which can be figured in connection with the Christmas tree trade. The an-