

## FOREST FIRES IN COASTAL AREAS.

(By H J Lyne, District Forester Taree, in Australian Forestry Journal Vol 1 No 3, July 1918)

(The text is reproduced below the facsimile, for easier reading:)

trict have pulled through a dry season, is stink-wood, a spiny, prickly scrub, growing often to 20 feet or more in height, with soft, pithy wood, and a flower similar to the English gerze. The name is derived from the peculiar odour the timber has when burnt or cut. Stockmen here lop the tree so that the head falls to the ground without breaking away from the stem, and stock will eat it bare. It will last for years in this lopped condition, and is a free grower on sandy loams. It has proved of great value in these districts.

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(By H. J. Lyne, District Forester, Taree.)

It is only by personal acquaintance with the severe forest fires which sweep the rough country in Coastal Districts of New South Wales that one can fully appreciate the difficulties of the problem we are up against in dealing with them.

I have given careful consideration to the matter in recent years, and one conclusion that appeals very forcibly to me is that if forests are kept free from fires for a few years they become more liable to ravages by pests, while, at the same time fire is essential to assist germination.

For example, I would refer to an area in the Dungog District, where there is a heavy stand of Ironbark badly affected by the lerp pest. One ridge was swept by a severe fire, which did not, however, seriously damage the trees which were fairly well grown. Where the fire had been there was an absence of the lerp insect next year; but where the fire had not been the insect again attacked the ironbark and many trees died.

Seedling crop, if it is to succeed, must be kept free from fire; but I am not sure if it is advisable to keep fire out after the seedlings have become well grown. I am of opinion that, at this stage, a mild floor fire—not accompanied by wind—assists the young growth materially and strengthens the stems; while the charring of the stumps, if not severe, keeps a lot of trees (especially matured ones) free from pests by destroying eggs and young insects in the bark, and the smoke assists to clean up the branches and foliage.

The main thing to consider is the question of fire control, remembering that "Fire is a good servant, but a bad master." Can we maintain effective control, and prevent the spread of fire, by means of breaks? Only those people who are really familiar with the subject can appreciate how quickly a fire will spread, or how it seems to burst out simultaneously in several places, and, as a general condition, there is at the time a strong wind, which carries sparks and pieces of burning bark from tree-top to tree-top over great distances, and, having this in mind, I am of opinion that fires I have recently experienced would not have been checked by breaks of five or six chains, or even more, in width.

Then we have to contend with the carelessness of the public, and of neighbouring landowners. Many people do not study forestry interests in the slightest degree—they have used the forests to run their stock in, and often regard a fire as beneficial, in so far as it destroys rank feed and ensures a crop of fresh green grass.

The only practical method of solving the problem (in rough country) with due regard to the regeneration of young growth and the checking of pests, is, in my opinion, to start fires when conditions are favourable at certain seasons of the year—bearing in mind, of course, the nature of crop desired, and the growth and condition of the floor. To do this satisfactorily I suggest the employment as "fire overseers" of men who are experienced as practical bushmen, and who have a good knowledge of locality and conditions. They should patrol the forests, and, as part of their duty, burn undergrowth and debris so as to keep the floor as clean as possible, and thus minimize the effect of fires that may come in from adjoining areas. I am satisfied from my own experience that such a system, coupled with fire-break protection, especially in the more level country, would result in much benefit to the State Forests generally.

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## NEW SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION.

The foregoing article opens a wide range for discussion. The fire prevention problem is perhaps the most difficult that Forest Service men have to consider. Mr. Lyne

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