

Report of the Minister for Lands on Forestry for the period from 1st April, 1958 to 31st March, 1959

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THE Report, which came to hand some time ago, deals with the period from the 1st April, 1958 to 31st March, 1959. It is now over two years behind as far as events in the forestry world are concerned and tends to make the task of reviewing rather difficult on that account. At the present rate of progress in State afforestation to be one year out of step is to be very much out of date.

Nevertheless, it may be of interest to readers of our journal, now and in the future, to record the main figures so helpfully summarised in the general review which appears on page five of the report.

The total productive area of land acquired was 25,244 acres. The planting figure is given as 22,500 acres. The area thinned was 7,776 acres and the average number of men employed on forestry work during the year was 4,673. These figures, with the exception of the last—viz. the number of men employed—all show substantial rises on the 1957/58 figures. The drop in the level of direct forestry employment is said to be due to the continued limitation of direct-labour work on thinnings and the extension of the system of obtaining road-metalling materials on contract. There is thus a static or declining labour force under the control of the forester and an increasing number of people working in the forest who are not directly responsible to the forester. While this may tend to lighten the forester's task in some ways it must surely increase the problem of supervision in regard to extraction damage and felling control.

The incentive bonus scheme for forestry workers was getting under way in fine style by the end of the period and already it could be claimed that it was the largest scheme of its kind ever undertaken in the country. It is, indeed, an achievement for forestry to have led the field in this way and it is to be expected that many fruitful results will flow from its introduction, both to management and labour.

The table that is of considerable interest to silviculturists is that which gives the percentages of various species planted. Sitka spruce is going from strength to strength having increased from 43.2% to 47.5% in the year. *Pinus contorta* is steadily losing ground but is a good second with 26.4% as against that for Norway spruce at 9.4% in third place. This limitation of species has many points in its favour from the marketing point of view but the need for greater diversity in the forest by species and by age classes must surely impress itself more and more on thinking foresters.

The activities of the Research Section of the Forestry Division are outlined in the report, but there are no details. Perhaps the time is near at hand when we can have a special separate report on research which will deal at length with research progress and give the results of field trials and assessments.

On the expenditure side the total given is £2,079,991, while the income figure is £316,134. The figures for increasing revenue and increasing expenditure might well be graphed for a period of years. They would obviously be a long way apart and perhaps it would be better to wait until the gap begins to close, as it must surely do in the not too distant future.

Again we miss the map and the tables which tell us how the counties are faring in the race for forestry honours and also the list of forests (which surely grows longer every year). The names of forests do not make dreary reading and there is no surer way of putting a forest "on the map" than by putting it in the Minister's report. Perhaps the missing items together with a general and historical review, could be incorporated in a more lengthy report at, say, five year intervals.

T.C.
