

FOREST FIRES

Having put 75 per cent of this county into forest reserves it would seem that the government should be under some obligation to protect the forests from the ravages of fire. There are numerous settlers within the reserves as quite a few homesteads were taken before the forest reserves were created, and being practically surrounded by the government forests the settlers are at the mercy of the fires which find unlimited fuel in the wilderness in which they are obliged to live.

For more than a month settlers, including women and children, have been fighting to save their homes and in nearly every instance the fires have originated on the government lands. The fire which started several weeks ago about twenty miles northwest of Kalispell on the foothill called Pilot Knob, is still burning and from this fire several others have been started by burning brands carried a mile or more by the winds. The settlers living along the eastern line of the reserve at this point have been fighting fire both on their own claims and on the government lands. A few men have been sent out by the government forester to fight the fires but they have refused to assist in controlling the fire on any land not owned by the government, the man in charge of the work for the government saying that settlers would have to take care of the fires on their own claims. This is a very short-sighted policy as a danger to one is a danger to all, but it is directly in line with the weak and inefficient management of the whole fire situation on the government timber reserves. Instead of sending men enough to cope with the situation and keeping them to patrol the fire after it is under control, a few men are sent and at the first moment the fire is under control the men are laid off in order to save expense. After the rain early in July all of the extra men in the government employ were discharged and in about a week the fires were again burning fiercely. If the forces had been kept at work after the rain all of the fires could have been kept under control.

If this part of the country is to be held by the government as an undeveloped wilderness it should at least be so managed as not to endanger the lives and property of the settlers who reside here.