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THE TIMBER FIRES.

With all the talk about conserving the forests of the country the intelligence displayed in this direction is about equal to that of the Indian medicine man who makes medicine to save his warriors from the bullets of the enemy, and the work done to preserve the forests is but little more effective than the work of the medicine man. In the first place nothing is done to prevent the indiscriminate slashing of timber by the lumber companies and individuals in their logging operations. In cutting the mature timber the tree tops and waste portions are left scattered upon the ground and these places form veritable fire traps which endanger the entire surrounding country. In most places only about one-third of the trees are large enough for lumber and the young timber that is left standing would in time furnish another crop of lumber if it were not for the fire that sooner or later devastates the cut over land. Certain portions of this country have been covered with forests for untold ages and the forest fires have been burning annually with but little, if any, damage until the ax of the lumberman began to build the fire traps, and the history of the forest destruction in the middle states seems destined to be repeated in Montana.

The methods followed by those who are supposed to control the timber fires are about as useless and uncertain as they could well be. The largest owner of timber lands is the general government; the next largest owner is the state, and then comes the lumber companies and individuals. Instead of cooperation and concerted effort among all of the different owners in the work of fighting fires there is a complete lack of it amounting almost to hostility between the different interests. The government foresters are chary about doing any work on any lands that do not belong to the government. The state won't spend a dollar except for work upon state lands, and other owners are only concerned when the fires get close to their own lands.

If all of the different owners would get together and formulate a concerted plan for fighting fire, dividing the expense in proportion to ownership and putting all of the work under one head in each district, there would be some chance of controlling the fires, even in the districts where timber slashing are common, but under the present method of compelling every owner to guard his own timber and nearly all of them working as cross purposes, the annual destruction of timber by fire will go on with but little interruption.