

RAILROADS WILL HELP UNCLE SAM KEEP DOWN FOREST FIRES

Northern Pacific and Great Northern Sign Agreement That Means the Saving of Millions of Dollars in Prevention of Forest Fires in West.

Special to the NEWS.

Washington, May 7.—Secretary Wilson has signed a memorandum of agreement with the Great Northern Railway company, and also one with the Northern Pacific Railway company, which provides for co-operation of the forest service and the railroads to prevent damage to the national forests from fires along all lines operated by these railroads. These agreements had already been signed by R. I. Farrington, vice-president of the Great Northern, and Howard Elliott, president of the Northern Pacific, so that they are, by the signature of the secretary of agriculture, now in force.

Reduce Fire Risk.

The agreements have in view both the reduction to the lowest point of the fire risk from the operation of the railroads and joint action by the forest service and the railroads to fight all fires which may start along the lines. The companies agree to clear and keep clear of inflammable material a strip of varying width, as conditions may demand, up to 200 feet beyond the right of way, and to provide all locomotives which do not burn oil with suitable spark arresters and other standard equipment to prevent the popping of fire. It is also stipulated that every effort be made by the companies to operate their locomotives so as not to cause fires. The protective strip is to be designated jointly by representatives of the railroad and the forest service.

To Fight Fires.

In fighting fires the railroads and the forest service will co-operate closely. Prompt notification to forest officers of all fires discovered by employes of the railroads is provided for. Telephone lines to make this possible will be put up by the forest service, using the companies' poles where this is desirable. Warning whistles will be

sounded by locomotives on occasion. Forces of fire fighters will be assembled on the outbreak of fires, made up of forest officers, railroad employes, and such temporary labor as can be gathered by either. Except for salaries of regular employes the cost of fighting fires which start within 100 feet of the railroads will be borne by the companies and of all others by the forest service, unless it shall be shown in the first case that the railroads were not responsible, or in the second case that they were responsible for the outbreak of the fire.

The agreement provides that the forest service will regularly patrol the right-of-way during the fire season. The work of clearing the strips satisfactorily, including disposal of all slash and refuse, is to be performed by the railroads under the supervision of the forest service.

Railroads Liable.

Since the courts have sustained the right of the department of agriculture to collect damages from railroads running through national forests for fires which they cause, there is in this fact a strong inducement for railroad companies to join with the department in the effort to keep fires down, but other reasons are doubtless potent, and perhaps the most potent ones, in favor of this agreement. The Northern Pacific, being a land grant railroad, owns a great amount of timber on the alternate sections along its line. The Great Northern, although it is not a land grant road, also has property at stake in its buildings and the line itself, operation of which may be seriously interfered with by forest conflagrations. The value of heavy timber in mountainous regions as a deterrent to avalanches, landslides and floods is also to be considered. But from the standpoint of a far-sighted business policy, a still broader argument is the relation of the forests to the general welfare of the regions whose traffic the railroads handle. Timber which goes up in smoke pays no freight tolls, and unchecked forest devastation means the enfeeblement of many industries, dependent on wood or water. For this reason, though there were no other, Secretary Wilson's foresters think the new arrangements of important significance.