

SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Preliminary details of areas which may suitably be incorporated in soil conservation districts under section 13 of the Act are being obtained. As previously mentioned, these will be the more sparsely populated areas where no large river problems pertain and where Catchment Board control is not warranted. This question is also bound up with the shortage of suitable administrative staff. Arrangements have been completed with the Canterbury Agricultural College and Canterbury University College for a special training course for Junior Soil Conservators to be appointed by the Council. The question of appointing a number of Senior Soil Conservators is also at present under consideration.

SOIL CONSERVATION RESERVES

The Council has, under section 16 of the Act, acquired several small areas in various parts of the country. The land involved is typical problem land, and valuable preliminary experimental work has been carried out during the year, the initial results of which are most encouraging. As additional technical staff becomes available, increased activity in this direction may be expected.

Ruatoria and Ihungia.—Surveys have been completed for the taking of land for these reserves.

Tangoio : Waikoau - Te Ngau.—On this area of about 1,000 acres of steep country adjoining the Napier-Wairoa State Highway some 104,000 trees were planted during the winter, mostly Douglas fir and macrocarpa, but owing to the very severe drought most of these died and the area will have to be replanted next winter.

Esk.—An area of approximately 7,500 acres comprising part of the headwaters of the Esk River has been resumed by the Crown. The object is to arrest the rapid run-off of heavy rain concentrations and thus prevent a repetition of the 1938 disaster in the lower Esk. Work has not yet been commenced on the control of the area acquired.

Wither Hills.—Contour and soil surveys and maps have been completed for the whole area. Fences have been maintained stock proof and grazing limited to three paddocks on the flats. Work has continued on the experimental grass flats. In spite of severe drought conditions, it may be assumed that the majority of the trees planted on the worst eroded portion of the reserve which did survive have a very good chance of ultimate survival. The original close spacing has obviated the necessity of replacements. The debris dams in the gullies have been raised and strengthened as necessary, while the live willow and flax planted in the dams are making good growth and assisting in soil retention.

Upper Wangamoa Valley.—This reserve has now been acquired. A cottage on the property houses the highway surfaceman, who also acts as caretaker of the reserve. A land survey has been completed of a further 70 acres of Native reserve adjacent which it is also proposed to acquire. The programme for development is almost complete.

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTAL WORK

Close co-operation with Government Departments associated in their work with the land, its soil, water, and vegetal resources, has been maintained through the Council's advisory Central Standing Committee, on which all such Departments are represented. A programme of research and experimental work on the conservation of soil was evolved, and through the Departments directly concerned the Council has commenced the implementation of some of these projects. The results of survey work on soils, pastures, vegetation, and land use are expected soon, while applied research into regrassing and improvement of eroded land has been commenced in the Poverty Bay Catchment District. In various localities in the South Island experimental work with new strains of grasses is under way.