

OTAGO.

Department of Lands and Survey,
District Office, Dunedin, 25th September, 1903.

Re Circular No. 507, Preservation of Native Forests.

In reference to the subjects contained in above circular, I regret this has been so long held over. The pressure of other work made it a difficult matter to go into such a large question as that involved in the various points referred to.

I have obtained from the Rangers within whose districts there is any bush reports giving the position so far as it affects certain localities. The report by Ranger O'Neill especially goes fully into the question.

The schedules supplied show—(a) Reserves made in Otago for the maintenance of water-supplies, &c.; (b) lands in Otago reserved to conserve scenic effect; (c) Crown lands that might also be reserved on behalf of objects referred to in (a) and (b); (d) native and private land that might be resumed to give effect to proposals sketched out by Circular No. 507.

These schedules deal with the principal points raised in your circular so far as Crown lands are concerned. The difficulty of dealing with private lands complicates this important question—that is, taking into account the fact that the greater part of the best and most available bush has been already alienated, and the repurchase would involve a great expenditure.

Putting the question of cost of resumption aside, it appears to me that the first thing that should be attended to is the resumption and reservation of all the forest country within a radius of six miles of Dunedin for the purpose of preserving the scenic beauties of the district and also conserving the sources of supply for the water required by Dunedin. Further, the open country within this radius should be planted, and that already cleared should be reforested, otherwise it will be impossible to keep a sufficient water-supply for the future requirements of an increasing city population.

Secondly, so far as the larger towns in Otago are concerned—viz., Oamaru, Palmerston, Port Chalmers, Mosgiel, Milton, and Lawrence—the first-named has already a good water-supply from the Waitaki River; and, so far as scenery is concerned, it would cost too much to repurchase any of the good land in that district for tree-planting. Palmerston is in the same position so far as water is concerned. In the vicinity of this town, however, there is the well-known Puketapu Hill. This hill is a prominent feature of the landscape, and were it purchased and planted it would very greatly beautify the scenery of this locality. Port Chalmers has a water-supply from one of the main creeks. In this case also the repurchase and retention of the bush in the country some distance away from the town would preserve the well-known beauty of the scenery. As the clearing is still going on in this locality the sooner this is taken in hand the better. The town of Mosgiel and its neighbourhood would be greatly beautified by the repurchase and plantation of the face of Saddle Hill, and the scenery generally would be greatly varied and improved. The town of Milton, being situated in the middle of a plain, cannot well be dealt with except at a greater cost than the benefit would warrant. The town of Lawrence has a good commonage within an easy distance which could be utilised for beautifying the neighbourhood of the town. The above remarks briefly deal with the benefits which the various towns enumerated would derive from forest-conservation and new plantation. All these proposals are practicable and would amply repay in a very short time not only the towns interested, but also eventually the colony.

The next point to be referred to is the bush in what is commonly known as “Catlin's.” Reference has been made in previous reports to the estimated quantity of milling-timber still available in that district, and so far as scenery is concerned the conservation of the bush for the purpose, except along the various rivers and coasts, might not be considered to be of much importance as, apart from anything else, the climate tends to prevent tourists and others from travelling in that district in search of scenery. The efforts of the Land Board have therefore been directed to the reservation as far as possible of the Crown lands on which there is any milling-timber growing and to getting the poorer bush cut down as quickly as possible, with the hope that the climate would thereby benefit. So far as the country in the vicinity of the lake is concerned, we are jealously guarding it from spoilation, and only in out-of-the-way places do we allow even the farmers to cut fencing or milling-timber. In these districts we have Rangers McKenzie and McDougall, both of whom are keenly interested in this matter, and the Land Board are careful to obtain their opinion in connection with any timber applications which may come before them. The hill country in these districts is also Crown lands, pastoral-leased, so that should it be so desired by the Forest Department there is ample scope for tree-planting in the district without having to repurchase.

I trust these remarks, with the attached reports, will be sufficient in the meantime. Should you desire more details in connection with private lands in connection with the suggestions I have made, they can be obtained and furnished as soon as possible.

The Surveyor-General, Wellington.

D. BARRON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.