

**FOREST PRESERVATION: SECOND
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF
FIRE WARDEN OF MINNESOTA,
FOR THE YEAR 1896, PP. 1-109**

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C. C. ANDREWS

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REGROWTH OF WHITE PINE ON CUT-OVER LAND, NEAR CARLTON, MINNESOTA.

FOREST PRESERVATION

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

CHIEF FIRE WARDEN

OF

MINNESOTA

UNDER THE ACT OF THE LEGISLATURE ENTITLED
"AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF FORESTS OF THIS STATE
AND FOR THE PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF FOREST AND
PRAIRIE FIRES," APPROVED APRIL 18, 1895.

FOR THE YEAR 1896.

ST. PAUL, MINN.:
PRINTED BY THE PIONEER PRESS COMPANY,
1897.

STATE OF MINNESOTA,
OFFICE OF CHIEF FIRE WARDEN,
ST. PAUL, May 27, 1897. }

Hon. R. C. Dunn, State Auditor and Forest Commissioner,

SIR: As required by section 3 of the Act for the Preservation of Forests, etc., approved April 18, 1895, I have the honor to submit, herewith, my annual report for the year 1896.

Very respectfully,

C. C. ANDREWS,
Chief Fire Warden.

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
CHIEF FIRE WARDEN
OF MINNESOTA.

In reviewing operations under the Forest Preservation Act one should bear in mind the very large extent of territory to be protected and the extremely economical plan on which the work has to be done. Fire wardens who have to be relied upon to take precautions to prevent the setting of forest and prairie fires, and to extinguish such fires if they occur, are paid for not exceeding fifteen days' service in a year and at the rate of two dollars per day. It is very seldom that a fire warden is paid for half that number of days. Their helpers can be paid for not more than five days in a year at the rate of one dollar and fifty cents a day. Two-thirds of the expenses are borne by the county in which they are incurred and the state pays the other third. But no county can expend, under this law, more than \$500 in a year.

DANGEROUS SEASON OF 1896.

The matter of most interest during the past year was the very dry and dangerous weather which prevailed in the Lake Superior region during most of the months of August and September. It was just the same sort of weather which

prevailed in Northern Michigan at the same time—a state which had no fire warden service—and where a forest fire caused the destruction of property amounting to several million dollars.¹ The most serious fires which occurred in

¹ *Pioneer Press, Aug. 26, 1896:*

GREEN BAY, WIS., Aug. 25.—Ontonagon, Mich., was destroyed by fire this afternoon. Of the city of about 2,000 population hardly a house is left standing. Among the property destroyed is the extensive plant of the Diamond Match Company and 6,000,000 feet of lumber in their yards. Conservative estimates place the loss at \$1,500,000. No lives were lost at last reports. Communication has been cut off since 5 p. m., and no further news will be possible until morning. The fire had been burning in the woods southwest of the city for two weeks. It was nearly out when a southwest gale yesterday and to-day swept in upon the town. At noon it was seen that the city was doomed. A message was sent to Supt. Minturn, of the St. Paul road at Green Bay, asking for a train to take the people away. The operator who sent the message was driven away from his instrument by the burning of the building. A train was ordered there from Pori, twenty-six miles south. The train reached Ontonagon and took a load of people to Rockland, ten miles away. It left again for Ontonagon for another load and since then nothing has been heard from them. At 5 o'clock the flames had swept through the main part of the city, destroying all the business houses, many residences, the match company's mills, the water works, electric light plant, courthouse, jail, etc. The flames then worked up the river to the rest of the city.

At midnight to-night the entire city is practically in ashes and two thousand people are homeless without clothing or shelter. Of this number 1,500 are in absolute want. The fire has swept away nearly every dwelling house, all stores and other places of business and all the big mills and other manufacturing plants. Whether or not there has been loss of life cannot be learned to-night. If no one perished in the wave of fire that swept from woods to lake it is little short of miraculous.

Pioneer Press, Aug. 27:

GREEN BAY, WIS., Aug. 26.—Advices received by railroad officials from stations within a few miles of Ontonagon are to the effect that only fifteen houses are left standing, but that no lives were lost. The heat from the burning mills and lumber was so intense that the people were compelled to seek shelter under trees and driftwood along the lake shore. Many walked to Rockland, fifteen miles away. There are about 1,800 men, women and children without food or shelter. Many are insufficiently clothed, and they suffered severely last night.

The Diamond Match Company lost two fine saw mills, having a daily capacity of 450,000 feet, and other mills and buildings worth in all nearly \$2,000,000 and lumber worth nearly \$1,000,000. Insurance to the extent of \$750,000 was carried with the Fleischeim agency of Menominee and the Douglas & Van Orden agencies at Houghton. The loss on the balance of the village will foot up about \$2,000,000, with \$300,000 insurance. The fire is still burning in the lumber piles and it is impossible to go among the ruins. Houghton and Hancock are raising provisions and clothing. Money is needed badly.

Minnesota were two causing damage to the amount of about \$5,000 each. As showing with more particularity the dangerous situation in this state I will here quote the preliminary report and annexed correspondence which I submitted at the close of the year:

OFFICE OF CHIEF FIRE WARDEN, }
ST. PAUL, Dec. 31, 1896. }

Hon. R. C. Dunn, State Auditor and Forest Commissioner:

SIR: In the form of a brief preliminary report I beg to hand you herewith a copy of some of the correspondence of this office, mostly communications from fire wardens, showing the danger of forest fires which prevailed in the Lake Superior region during the past season. It does not include all of the forest fires which occurred but it includes the more serious ones. In almost the entire Lake Superior region there was dry and dangerous weather for several weeks. I invite your particular attention to the contrast between the situation in this state and in Michigan, which has no fire warden law. On the 25th of August the village of Ontonagon, Mich., with property to the amount of several million dollars, was destroyed by a forest fire which had been previously burning in the woods southwest of the village for two weeks. The weather was just as dry and dangerous in Minnesota as in Michigan, and, although forest fires occurred in this state, nothing happened which could in any degree be compared with the calamity at Ontonagon. If we had no fire warden law people would, of course, turn out to protect their own property from fire and their neighbors would help them. But how about the forest fire burning some distance away, possibly on some non-resident's land? That is the kind of fire—if we had no fire warden law—most likely to be neglected, and therefore most likely finally to prove dangerous. It is the business of fire wardens to look after such fires, as well as others, and have them extinguished.

No one should claim for this law all the credit of preventing and extinguishing forest fires in Minnesota the past season, but to deny that it proved of very considerable public benefit would be unjust to many fire wardens and their helpers, whose activity was effective and praiseworthy. With further experience on the part of those charged with the execution of the law it ought to prove still more effective.

Very respectfully,

C. C. ANDREWS,
Chief Fire Warden.

CORRESPONDENCE.

AITKIN COUNTY.

E. Bakkila, of the town of Beaver, August 25th:

The weather has been dry here over two months. All is safe in respect to fire yet.

E. O. Brown, chairman town of Kimberly, August 27th:

The weather has been dry all summer with only a few small showers of rain. If there does not come a good soaking rain there is very much danger of fire this fall as the ground is as dry now as two years ago.

Same, October 1st:

It is very dangerous for fires in this section of the state and big fires are already started not far from this point. The closest watch is kept and everyone is as careful as possible, but the greatest danger is from bird hunters and railroad engines. The first named are traveling all over the woods this fall.

James McAskill, chairman town of Hazelton, August 30th:

We have had no rain here for a month and there is danger of fires. There are very few settlers in this part of the county, which is all heavy timbered and rank growth of grass. If the dry weather continues it will be hard to stop fires.

Anders Larson, of the town of Glen, September 30th:

No rain for the last two weeks. There is plenty of food for the fire as the grass and weeds are grown very thick through the woods.

CARLTON COUNTY.

H. M. Waldref, chairman of the town of Mahtowa, September 22d:

It is very dry and great danger of fires at this place. There have been fires repeatedly kindled here for the past six weeks by the stock farm employes, by the owner's orders, and the whole place is on fire to-day.

October 3d, he reports:

Since receiving your letters I have not had time to report to you, have been so busy fighting fires. I have had four buildings, together with a lot of personal property and a fine park, burnt up. Total loss for myself \$3,000. Several persons have lost small quantities of hay from fire. At the present time the fire is completely under control. I have had out fighting fire about thirty-five men and four teams on an average of two and a half days each.

John A. Swanson, of the town of Atkinson, September 29th. [Telegram]:

Forest fires are endangering our homes and property. It is in the live timber and hay meadows now. Send us help.

D. Moses, president village council, Cloquet, September 30th:

Sent thirty-eight men to fire at Atkinson and Carlton.