a destruction of forests will have on the steadily growing business of entertaining summer residents and tourists. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are now spent every year in this state by travelers from other sections. But what attracts these people is our lakes and forests. The former are to no small degree dependent for their beauty and their very existence on the latter. With the removal of the forest, this source of income, which ought to grow from year to year, would be lost to our people.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the question of forest preservation is one of guarding our people against a heavy burden of taxation. The sale of forest lands has in the past produced a large revenue to the state treasury. That source of revenue must, in the nature of things, soon disappear. But the experience of other countries has shown that forests, owned and managed by the state, can be made to contribute greatly to the public revenues. Ought not a wise legislation to consider whether Wisconsin cannot in the future derive such a revenue from its forests in order to help to bear the necessary expenses of the government, which will otherwise have to be met by taxing the people?

Taking it for admitted that it is worth while to pass laws on the subject of forestry, we will now discuss the question as to what measures should be taken by the state in this matter. The first question to be considered will be that of fire protection; then will come the question of the relative advantages of public and private ownership of forests; and finally the consideration of practicable steps for the fostering of either system of management.

FOREST FIRES.

Without some effective system of protection against forest fires, there is no hope of placing the forest industries of Wisconsin on a stable basis. This matter is of more urgent necessity than anything else connected with the subject. The enormous injury done to the forests of the state by fire is fully set forth in the report on Forest Conditions. But the tale there told refers only to the material in the forests themselves. It says nothing of the homesteads, villages and cities destroyed, nor of the untold misery caused by the destruction of human life; in such appalling disasters as the Phillips fire, which is still fresh in the memory of the people, or the horrible occurrences at Turtle Lake, Cumberland and elsewhere, during the fall of 1898.
The prevention of forest fires is clearly as much a duty of the public authorities as the prevention and extinguishment of fire in cities. If the expenditure of money for that purpose is necessary, the people will not grudge it any more than they refuse to be taxed for the maintenance of fire departments in cities. If it is found that the expense of guarding against fires is too great for the slender means of the towns and counties in the forest districts, it is but fair that the state at large should contribute, for the whole state will be benefited by the result.

For some years there has been on our statute books a law designed to establish a forest and marsh fire police, and there is no doubt that much good has been accomplished by its administration. The way in which it has worked, together with many wise suggestions as to its improvement, will be found in the biennial report of the state forest warden, Mr. Egbert Wyman. There is consequently no need, in further legislation, to depart from the direction already taken. All that is required is a further development of the measures already adopted.

The amendments so required, in the opinion of this commission, are as follows:

1. There should be an adequate machinery for the supervision of the local fire wardens. This supervision is now entrusted to the chief clerk of the land office, who may appoint one clerk in said office as his deputy. These two officials have important other duties to perform which keep them in Madison. They cannot possibly devote much of their time to work in the field. There is consequently no means of seeing to it that the local wardens do their duty. It stands to reason that a warden who through incapacity or negligence fails to see that fires in his district are prevented or extinguished as far as possible, is as bad if not worse than no warden at all.

2. The officials appointed to supervise the local wardens should have power themselves to begin proceedings against violators of the fire laws, and it should be the duty of the district attorneys to prosecute such cases whenever called upon. At present is left to the discretion of district attorneys whether they will prosecute or not.

3. Local wardens should be encouraged to enforce the penal clauses of the fire law by being given one-half of the fines imposed after conviction through their instrumentality.

4. It is not fair that the towns in which fires occur should bear the whole expense of the fire police. The prevention of forest fires is a matter which is of the utmost importance to the whole state, as well as to the immediate neighborhood. The
towns in which forest fires are most likely to do damage are mostly among those least able to expend money for their prevention and extinguishment. It would be both fair and prudent, if the state cares to have forest fires prevented, to have the towns reimbursed by the state for one-half of all expenses incurred under the forest fire law. The fact that all such bills must first be audited and allowed by the town boards will be a guarantee against excessive and fraudulent claims, as the town supervisors will presumably have means of ascertaining the facts which state officials at a distance might often lack.

The exact manner in which these improvements of the fire law can be effected will be discussed below in the detailed comment on the bill accompanying this report. But a few words should be added here as to what may and what may not be reasonably expected in the way of preventing this arch-enemy of Wisconsin forests. It would be too much to hope for an entire disappearance of destructive forest fire in the near future. That goal cannot approximately be reached until the entire forest area of the state has been brought into a condition of cultivation such as is known in the forests of Prussia and Saxony. As long as lumbering operations leave a mass of uncared for debris; as long as there are hundreds of square miles with practically no roads; and as long as hunters and woodsmen are careless in leaving camp fires unguarded at a distance of miles from the nearest settlement, so long there will be forest fires. On the other hand, it is unworthy of the prudence and energy of the American people to submit to the annual infliction of such a calamity with the stolidity of Turks, as if they were unavoidable like earthquakes. It should not be forgotten that practically every forest fire is the result of the culpable negligence, or worse, of some individual. Moreover, every forest fire has a very small beginning and can at first easily be put out. A community which allows the smoke of small fires to arise for days at a time, during a dry season, without taking steps to extinguish them, has only itself to blame if finally it is overtaken by such frightful disasters as the Phillips fire of 1894, or the fires of the fall of 1898.

The occurrences in Barron County during the latter season, when hundreds of settlers lost all they had, and still greater calamities were with difficulty averted, has called public attention to this matter of forest fires with renewed force. The charity of the people of the state has not failed to attempt an alleviation of the suffering. The power of the state has been called in for the same purpose, and properly so. But would it not be more humane, more prudent, and at the same time more economical, if
the state took the necessary steps to prevent the recurrence of such things? Even when one looks at the matter simply from the lowest standpoint of dollars and cents, it is plain that the people of the stricken community as well as the state at large would be much better off if they spent a few hundred dollars annually for the proper policing of the threatened districts. The damage done by the fires of last autumn is not confined to the immediate destruction of property and the injury done to the soil. Far more serious is the injury arising from the set-back which the settlement and development of every locality must receive in which such disasters threaten the newcomer. To fail in doing everything possible to remedy this evil, even at much greater expense than will actually be necessary, would justly expose the representatives of the people to the charge of having flagrantly neglected the duties with which they are entrusted.

The ultimate object of every effective fire law must be to make it impossible for any fire to get a start anywhere without coming at once under the observation of some one who will make it his business to put it out or to notify immediately the nearest fire warden who will attend to its extinguishment. To accomplish this end it is necessary not only to appoint a large number of local fire wardens, but above all to foster the development of a public opinion among the people of the forest districts, which will frown upon negligence in the handling of fire in the woods as a disgraceful crime. Every means should be used to create such a public opinion where it does not now exist, and to this end the school, the press, the pulpit and every other possible agency should be used.

With these principles firmly held in view there is every reason to believe that legislation can be so shaped that forest fires will soon be a rare event among the mature timber, and will be the exception and not as now the rule, in areas of new growth. With such a condition of things, any money or effort spent on the permanent cultivation of forests will be a business-like proposition, sure to benefit the people by feeding its industries, and reasonably certain to yield a direct pecuniary return upon the investment.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS.

Apart from questions of climate and water flow the interest which the state has in the forests contained within its area is of