ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

—ON—

TIMBER AND FORESTRY.

—:o:—

INTERIM REPORT.

To His Honour THOMAS WILSON PATERSON,
Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of British Columbia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR HONOUR:

We, your Commissioners appointed on the ninth day of July, 1909, for the purpose of making inquiry into all matters connected with the timber resources of the Province of British Columbia and to report the facts found by us and the means that should be adopted to conserve the present supply of timber, to guard against fire and to utilise vacant lands suitable for afforestation, have the honour to submit the following interim report:—

The Commission commenced its work on the 16th day of August, 1909, holding its first session at Victoria, and from that time until the 30th day of September, sittings were held in different parts of the Province, some ninety witnesses being heard, besides receiving memorials and hearing deputations from various parties and municipalities interested. In addition, the Commission attended the National Congress on Conservation of Natural Resources, held at Seattle on the 26th, 27th and 28th August.

The questions to be investigated by the Commission are many and of the utmost importance; so important, in fact, that while the Commission has already obtained a vast amount of evidence, covering considerably over one thousend typewritten pages, it feels that it should continue its investigations still further and exhaust all possible sources of information before venturing to submit a final report.

At the outset, however, the attention of the Commission was called to the fact that at the last session of the Legislature the Government announced that it had come to the determination that the tenure of the special timber licences would, at the next session of the Legislature, receive the attention of the administration in the way of some provision that would make for the perpetuity of the licence until the timber is removed, but on such terms and conditions as the Government then may deem prudent in the best interests of the Province and people of British Columbia, and, in consequence, the Honourable the Premier has requested us, if possible, to make an interim report dealing with this question of tenure.

In compliance with this request, we have given careful consideration to this question, and in order to implement the decision of the Government we beg to submit the following:—

A majority of the witnesses who appeared before us strongly advocated that the licences be made renewable in perpetuity, or at least for so long as there should be merchantable timber on the lands covered by such licences. A great many of the witnesses also strongly urged that the rentals or annual licence fees charged for such renewals should be fixed unalterably at not more than the present rates, though, with a few exceptions, they thought that the Government should retain control of the royalties to be charged.

A careful consideration of the facts adduced in the evidence submitted, and of the opinions of some of the best known authorities on timber and forestry matters, have led us to the unanimous conclusion that the proposed extension of tenure of these licences, under proper safeguards, will not work to the disadvantage of the Province.

While, as intimated above, we are not yet prepared to formulate in detail what these safeguards should be, yet, having due regard to the best interests of the Province, and giving due consideration to the difficult and fluctuating conditions surrounding the timber industry and the necessity of protecting and encouraging the already large investments involved in the same, so as to aid and assist, in every legitimate way, the development, conservation and perpetuation of this great provincial asset, we suggest that the existing rates, terms and conditions for the present, and pending our final report, be left undisturbed, and in particular we emphatically urge that the Government do not in any way restrict or limit its right and power to amend or adjust from time to time the rentals or licence fees and the royalties to be charged, as well as the conditions, regulations and restrictions under which timber may be cut.

We, therefore, recommend that the proposed amendment be so framed as to provide that the special timber licences, other than those provided for in sub-section (2) of section 57 of the Land Act, shall be renewable from year to year, so long as there is on the land included in such licence merchantable timber in sufficient quantity to make it commercially valuable (proof of which might be required by the Chief Commissioner), but that such renewal shall be subject to the payment of such rental or licence fee, and such tax or royalty, and to such terms, conditions, regulations and restrictions as may be fixed or imposed by any Statute or Order-in-Council in force at the time renewal is made; that power should be provided or reserved for the Chief Commissioner or Government where, after inspection, it is found the land is fit for tillage and settlement, and required for that purpose, that he or they may require the licensee to remove the timber from such land within a fixed reasonable time, at the end of which period the land shall be opened for settlement upon such terms as the Government shall see fit.

Also, that if any holder of a licence, provided for in sub-section (2) of said section 57, desires to take advantage of the privilege of renewal provided for in this amendment, he shall, within six months after the passing of such amendment, surrender the licence held by him and the privileges now appertaining thereto.

Your Commissioners are carefully investigating the constitution of Forestry Departments in other Governments and countries, with the object of recommending the establishing of such a Department in British Columbia, and, pending the securing of the fullest data, we are of the opinion that the Government will be well advised to provide in the next Estimates an increased amount (at least double that of 1909), for the purpose of supplementing the system of forest fire protection already inaugurated, which, so far as the limited amounts appropriated in previous years would permit, has been shown by the evidence to be most effective in reducing the number and extent of fires.

We might add, in conclusion, that in our opinion a carefully thought-out policy as to the best method of dealing with the present unalienated timber lands of the Province should be decided upon before the same are dealt with; as it is our intention to consider this question carefully and submit a recommendation in our final report, we would respectfully suggest that the present reserve be in the meantime continued.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

We have the honour to be

Your Honour's obedient servants,

FRED'K. J. FULTON,
Chairman.

A. C. FLUMERFELT,
Commissioner.

A. S. GOODEVE,
Commissioner.

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