

Forester's Annual Report F.Y. 62

Speymouth Forest

A. General Review

A good growth season has been the outcome of some very peculiar weather.

The number of weedings required on grass areas with small plants has been as high as four, a fair average being three weedings.

In one area the application of manure to newly planted C.P. has formed a growth of grass so strong that it has already cost us some plants in spite of numerous weedings. This will require an additional plant demand for B/U to prevent the loss of one year and the longer continuation of weeding.

Fire protection measures have been required only sporadically due to the dull, cold and sometimes wet summer.

Helicopter spraying was carried out in an effort to kill off all scrub on two areas - one of 30 acres and one of 10.5 acres. The chemical used was 2-4-5-T at 4 pints to 12 galls. water per acre on the 30 acre area, on whin, broom, birch and alder with a scattering of ash coppice. Everything was killed except the Ash. On the 10.5 acre area the rate of spray was 5 pints of 2-4-5-T to 12 galls. water per acre.

The weeds were similar and the results the same.

104 acres were planted on weedy type areas which will require a lot of attention in F.Y. 63.

The initial survey of the forest has been completed and the sub-compartmenting is in hand.

B. The Year's Work

1. Finance

Total Estimate was - - - - £21,115

Speymouth Expenditure - - - £18,087

Underspent by - - - - £ 3,028

Progress Report Part 4 - - - £ 4,550

Brush Burning was overspent by £647. This was the clearing up of blown spruce areas during very bad weather conditions.

Ploughing was underspent by £75. This was scattered areas and we were able to move the machine ourselves thereby losing practically no time.

Planting was underspent by £187. Mostly due to good ploughing.

Drains New underspent by £267. This was left to help cover an overspending of £451 on drains repairs mostly due to windblow.

Weeding underspent by £378. Just insufficient labour to cope with grass weedings. These are still going on.

High Pruning underspent by £630. I would have been better advised had I done the high pruning rather than the burning of brush in item (1) above.

Fences New underspent by £107. This was saved for fence repairs which ended up overspent by £168 due to the need for repairs to farm fences which were unestimated for.

Beating Up We spent an additional £162 here firming up windblown plants.

Fire Protection A saving of £562 which isn't much when one considers the weather. We dealt with only 4 fires and had no damage.

1. Finance (contd.)

Protection Other A saving of £426 was made by using trappers for other work whenever it seemed justified.

Rabbits destroyed	- 470
Hares	- 197
Roe Deer	- 11
Foxes	- 9
Fox Cubs	- 26
Pigeons	- 84
Hooded Crows	- 22

Survey Work Underspent by £499. The man who was doing this work left the job and I have just recently got the surveying re-started.

Cone Kiln We extracted 4,930 bushels and produced 1,650 lbs, 6 ozs. of seed. Between collection and extraction we are overspent by £ 57.

Cone Collection We collected 1074½ bushels of cones.

2. Organisation, Staff, Labour and Training

Organisation is based on time-work with a Head Forester, a Forester, and Five Gangers, one of whom is in charge of the trapping team.

Labour consists of

- 5 Gangers
- 14 Grade 1 workman
- 4 Grade 11 workmen
- 4 trappers
- 2 Lorry Drivers
- 2 Boys
- 1 Forest Clerkess
- 1 D.O.'s Clerkess
- 1 D.O.'s Cleaner

During the winter months from 26-30 salmon fishers are employed, all except one being Grade 111.

At 30th September, 1962 Messrs Riddoch, the recognised resident timber merchant, had 11 men working in the forest.

Training The new Forest Tools Instructor held a course of instructions on Planting during the season. Planting stopped too soon afterwards to make a proper judgement of results.

3. Developments in Technique I can't think of a thing!

4. Seed Collection From the 2 Seed Stands we collected 90 bushels of S.P. cones.
From Seed Stand thinnings we collected 59½ bushels of S.P. cones.
From the Forest generally we collected 925 bushels.
Total Collection was 1074½ bushels at an average cost of 14/7 per bushel.
There is a limited quantity of cones available for collection but since only 15 bushels are required from Seed Stands for F.Y. 63 this is of no consequence.
We should be considering the question of collecting and supplying nurseries like Ben Reid's of Aberdeen.
Collection could be done by forest staff in their own time and a suitable price per bushel agreed. This method of working would give us, eventually, complete control of our own cones.

6. Plantations

(i) Establishment

P.46, 47, 48, and 49 S.S./S.P. mixtures mentioned in F.Y. 61 report are definitely progressing.

The S.S. almost everywhere are showing better colour and increasing leader growth. The exceptions are in some parts where S.S. has been planted pure in heather and these are still firmly in check. A decision as to whether we should spray the heather and kill it, or add a 50% mixture of P.C. should be made soon. None-the less the overall picture here is very encouraging.

(ii) Maintenance

Maintenance of drains at Aultash has been badly upset by recurrent windblow and the fact that Messrs Jones were working all the area all the time and never seemed to finish anything. We have now got rid of this firm and the end of next year should show an improvement. Weeding of groups and planted up blown areas is posing quite a problem. The best approach so far is to allocate a limited number of these areas to a small squad and weed in rotation.

(iii) Improvement

There has been a considerable fall off in the blowing over of young crops of S.P. and P.C. I believe that when this first started that all factors must have been critical at the same time. Recent evidence, from a student doing his thesis, shows that root development in S.P. on Slorach's Hill has increased greatly since similar investigations were made 3 years ago. Roots which were then practically confined to one furrow are now spread in all directions over as much as 3 furrows. This is insufficient for anything other than a guide, but it is encouraging.

(iiii) Protection Fire, Other

The year has been such that someone is almost bound to be caught unawares if this autumn becomes dry. Little or no ^{protection} ~~precaution~~ has been required.

Money has been spent on routine protection measures mostly.

Vermin Control has been normal with the occasional pocket of rabbits appearing.

No myxomatosis is in evidence at present.

A heavy attack on Roe Deer is now a must.

I was under the misguided impression that the new control system was to be introduced when one of my trappers returned from a course on this subject, but the necessary equipment is not forthcoming and the old-fashioned shot-gun will have to be used, and to good effect.

7. Production

(1) Preparation and Extraction

Felling

Hardwoods by F.C.

1035 Cu. ft.

Hardwoods by Merchants

3680 Cu. ft.

4,715 Cu.ft.

Conifers by F.C.

3857 Cu.ft.

Conifers by Merchants

33919 Cu.f.t

37,776 Cu.ft.

Thinnings

Hardwoods by F.C.

NIL

Hardwoods by Merchants

Conifers by F.C.

NIL

Conifers by Merchants

55, 487 Cu. ft.

GRAND TOTAL

97,978 Cu.ft.

7. Production (contd.)

Gale damage has not been on any large scale since September '61 but there have been a large number of small amounts of damage causing us to make numerous additions to sales.

(ii) Sale of Produce, Markets & Prices

There is only one merchant here Messrs. Riddoch.
There is only one method of selling, Standing Sales.
There are no new outlets.

8. Roads & Bridges

Expenditure under £400. Nothing to report.

9. Mechanical Equipment

No new equipment has been issued since last year. The faults in the Jo-bu brush saw described in last year's report are still evident. The best of a Fire injector instead of a normal sparking plug, also mentioned in last year's report, ended with the decision that there was no worthwhile gain in changing over.

Maintenance of all types of machinery is done on a recorded system so that nothing is missed out. Repairs which can be done locally are carried out by the Mobile Mechanic or, in his absence at the local garage. All major jobs are sent to Blackhall by the Mobile Mechanic, and the lesser jobs are dealt with in his local repair workshop.

11. Working Plans

The surveying of all compartment boundaries has been completed and working maps have been received from Conservancy Office. The sub-compartmenting of the forest is now under way using the new maps and the new compartment numbers where they were applied. It is hoped to complete the survey of all timber areas during the non-growing season and, by the end of F.Y. 63, to have the whole forest completed. Proper stock maps can then be produced.

14. Sociological Aspects

The Forestry Commission probably employ more local labour than any other industry in Pochabers. There are bigger employers of labour, but much of it is imported daily into the village from surrounding towns. The Commission's influence therefore, is quite strong locally. The relationship between forestry and farming is amicable. The status of F.C. staff is above average. Many of the local inhabitants still remember the days of the Dukes of Gordon, and the same system was fostered for a long time by the Crown Lands office here, so that anyone who appears to have more than ordinary authority is treated with great respect. The younger generation may well alter all this in the next few years. I'm wondering what I shall write here next year on this subject.

15. Forest Influences

I believe that, on some hill farms adjoining the forest where subsiding and subsequent vertical drainage has taken place, the water is finding a new level from which to emerge on the surface causing, in at least one case, insurmountable draining problems for the farmer. I have been shot down in flames by some senior officers for this one, but I still consider it to be true.

We are losing land daily from river erosion particularly in the Aultdeary burn region where it joins the River Spey. Gully erosion is still quite active over the forest and will continue to be so until the present tree crop is well established. Forest roads and fire traces on the hills would quickly become gullies if they were left to themselves for a few years.

16. Amenity & Access to the Countryside

This forest has a large number of very pleasant walks which have survived from the Dukes of Gordon days and are fairly regularly used by the older inhabitants of the village. Occasionally a walk or path has been abandoned for the much superior F.C. road which is unlikely to have concealed pools of water lying around for the unwary traveller to step into.

R. J. Meier

HEAD FORESTER

4/10/62