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Protection of the Forests of the Commonwealth.

The necessity for a law more comprehensive than can now be found upon the Statute Books of Massachusetts for the protection of forests against fire, has long been felt by all persons interested in forest property. The damage inflicted every year by forest fires in this State is very large. The damage is not confined to the actual destruction of trees. Forest fires destroy the forest, the fertility of the soil, and consequently its capacity to reproduce the forest growth thus destroyed. The gradual deterioration in the composition of the forest, the result of fire, represents a more permanent and serious loss to the State than the destruction of a single forest crop. The frequent occurrence of forest fires destroys confidence in the value of forest property. A community in which no real effort is made to prevent or control forest fires, has little encouragement to improve or extend its forests. The fear of forest fires makes investments in forest property insecure and undesirable ; it prevents forest planting, and causes the premature cutting of immature forests. Any attempt to improve the forests of the State is useless until they can be secured greater immunity from fire.

The law already sufficiently provides for the protection of the forest against fires originating in malice and wanton recklessness, by the following sections :

PUBLIC STATUTES. — CHAPTER 203.

SECTION 5. Whoever willfully and maliciously burns or otherwise destroys or injures a pile or parcel of wood * * * or any standing tree * * * of another shall be punished by imprisonment in the State prison not exceeding five years, or by fine not exceeding five hundred dollars and imprisonment in the jail not exceeding one year.

1882. CHAPTER 163.

SECTION 1. Whoever wantonly and recklessly sets fire to any materials which causes the destruction or injury of any growing or standing wood of another shall be punished by fine not exceeding one hundred dollars, or by imprisonment in jail not exceeding six months.

Forest fires rarely originate in malice but in carelessness, and provision is needed for the prevention and punishment of such carelessness.

A Committee acting under authority from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, and after having heard the opinion of many persons interested in the matter, have determined to present the accompanying bill for legislative action.

We invite the co-operation of all interested in the agricultural prosperity of Massachusetts in securing its passage.

It must not be forgotten that legislation in advance of public sentiment cannot accomplish any very marked results, and unless the commercial and climatic value of the forest to the community is appreciated, the mere passage of a law will not greatly decrease the number of fires. The forest will only find perfect protection in general appreciation.

CHARLES S. SARGENT,
Chairman.

FRANCIS H. APPLETON,
Secretary of Committee.

BOSTON, 13th FEBRUARY, 1886.







