

## *California's Christmas Tree Problem*

Proximity to an abundant source of supply and an increasing local demand has made California vulnerable in recent years to opportunists seeking quick returns in the Christmas tree business. The trade, always a profitable one to established tree dealers in California, experienced difficulties during the war years because of the increasing numbers of persons with limited capital wanting to get rich quick. Out-of-state wholesalers and wholesalers dealing in stolen trees have supplied these opportunists' wants and, as a consequence, the markets have been glutted beyond redemption. It was estimated that fully 75 per cent of the trees reaching the retail market in 1943 went unsold and had to be destroyed.

In 1944 officials of the Division of Forestry, U. S. Forest Service, and certain Christmas tree dealers met to discuss the problem. The factors responsible for present market instability were determined to be: (1) large quantities of inferior and unsaleable domestic and out-of-state trees shipped to the market; (2) the bootlegging of stolen trees to the market, thus underselling legitimately cut and purchased trees; (3) the influx, particularly in years when we have open weather up until late in December, of dealers who enter the business with little or no funds and less knowledge of good cutting practices and who, as late as December 20th, continue to flood the market with unsaleable trees. After much consideration, this group recommended a proposed law to the 1945 Legislature similar to the existing Christmas Tree Law in the State of Minnesota. The proposal required a license fee of \$50 for all Christmas tree cutters and a 2-cent tree tag to be snapped on each tree before leaving the cutting area, thus marking it as a legitimate tree. It also proposed that all out-of-state trees be subject to this tagging phase of the act. By this system, the State Forester would have been able to foretell the annual cut and import and thus advise the public and dealers of any danger of shortage or surpluses. This suggestive legislation was not given favorable action and as a result the Division entered this year's Christmas tree sale unable to be of real aid to the legitimate dealer. As in the three previous years, we afforded an intensive road block to the main traveled roads for the purpose of spotting those involved in transporting trees without a notarized bill of sale from the property owner or his agent that is now required by State law. This check system reduced considerably the bootlegging of stolen trees to market, but it has not reduced the tremendous surplus stock losses experienced by many retailers. It is estimated that 1945 losses in trees was second only to the disastrous year of 1943.

The Division will, in the future, continue its road block system during the two-week period in December. Working in cooperation with the California

Department of Agriculture Border Quarantine Stations, the California Highway Patrol, and the U. S. Forest Service, we will approximate the number of trees entering the State from out-of-state markets, and will ascertain the number of trees legally cut domestically. On the strength of this partial survey, we will, as we have in 1944 and 1945, inform the California people and especially the retailers of a surplus or a shortage of trees. We can not, however, be of full service to the dealer and we can not correct the yearly loss of trees until this problem is given further constructive consideration by the Legislature.



The brush covered watershed lands of Southern California are the most highly valued wild-lands in the State, due to the importance of water in the development and expansion of the area. The State and the Federal Government recognize a definite responsibility in preventing and suppressing fires on these lands as well as on the timbered watershed lands of Northern California.