

PART II.—FURS

Section 1.—The Fur Industry*

Several centuries of hunting and trapping have not seriously affected the capacity of Canada's stock of fur bearing animals to make a leading contribution to the world's requirements of furs of the highest quality. The rapid development of the country and the opening up of the western provinces during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together with improvements in transportation and subsequent settlement, caused the exhaustion of fur resources in the settled areas. More recently, the development of mining on a large scale over the Canadian Shield forced the trapper still farther northward. Nevertheless, the belt of Northern Canada extending across the Yukon and Northwest Territories, the northern parts of the Prairie Provinces, through northern Ontario and Quebec and into the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland is one of the world's few remaining natural reserves for fine furs. It is quite probable that minerals and furs will continue to be the chief resources of this vast area as much of it is not suited to settlement or forest growth of commercial value.

It is realized that the fur wealth of the country is a very valuable asset, as it has been since the early days of settlement, and is capable of considerable development. Under well-planned conservation policies and by the imposition of closed seasons at appropriate times as well as by the establishment of natural preserves, the yield of wild fur is being maintained and even increased. On the other hand, the industry of fur farming is relatively new and much has still to be learned as to the best methods and techniques to be adopted. Yet its potentialities are such as to offer ample reward to those who are prepared to work steadily and intelligently toward the goal of raising animals with pelts at least equal to the best caught in their natural habitat.

The conservation of wild fur bearing animals is a matter coming under the jurisdiction of the respective provincial and territorial governments, although the Federal Government is also concerned with the conservation of fur and of all wildlife resources. The general policy with regard to the fur bearing animals follows two main lines—the regulation of the taking of animals by limitations of catch or closed season so as to prevent their extinction in districts where conditions provide a suitable habitat, and the provision of sanctuaries in strategic places to serve as reservoirs from which large areas of surrounding wild country may be restocked. Many of the most valuable fur bearing animals are subject to marked fluctuations in numbers. The periods of abundance and of scarcity recur with sufficient regularity to be called cycles. Such cycles have an important bearing upon the fur trade generally and more particularly upon the well-being of that large portion of the Indian and Eskimo population which depends upon fur trapping for much of its livelihood.

The fur industry contributes about \$25,000,000 annually to Canada's export trade. About two-thirds of the total production of pelts goes outside the country, principally to the United States and the United Kingdom. Before World War II, the London market took about 80 p.c. of the total production of Canadian fox farms and also large quantities of every other kind of fur. However, when the War started, the London market was practically lost and other outlets had to be explored. United States fox breeders feared their market would be flooded with imported silver fox pelts and, at their request, a quota permitting the import of 58,000 units from Canada was instituted in the 1939-40 season, a unit consisting of a leg, head, tail or piece. Before the opening of the quota, United States interests came to Canada, purchased quantities of low-grade fox pelts and cut off the paws, heads and tails, thus making seven units from each fox. When the quota opened the pieces were shipped and the quota filled overnight, preventing the export of further silver fox that season. This situation was soon remedied, however, by the raising of the quota to 70,000 pelts. Since Canada's yearly production at that time was approximately 300,000 pelts, only the better grades were exported and the consequent competition had the effect of raising the quality of foxes produced.

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