

would be no forest acreage or recreation facilities to administer. In recent years, the State has been among the leaders in forest fire prevention and control. Only on one occasion in the past decade has more than 2,000 acres burned in any single year.

The State is divided into nine fire control areas, each with a supervisor and from one to six forest rangers. There are thirty-four fire towers scattered across the State, from extreme Western Maryland to the lower Eastern Shore. The central command post is located at the Long Hill station in Anne Arundel County.

The Department is constantly expanding its campaign for forest fire prevention in every way possible and has achieved an excellent record over the years. The efficiency of the suppression program is evidenced by the reduction in the annual loss from forest fires, which has been kept well below the national average for seventeen consecutive years.

The Information Division, in effect, is the Department's link with the general public. Since the taxpayer's money is being spent to provide him with the best possible forests and parks program, it is important that he be kept well informed of the Department's activities. This is accomplished through the medium of newspapers, radio and television, and implemented with brochures, reports, displays and talks presented to civic groups, clubs and other organizations. This Division also processes requests for information which come through the mail. The Division also endeavors to keep forests and parks personnel abreast of developments by way of a monthly newsletter.

Recognizing a long-standing need for a full-time attorney to handle the legal problems arising from land acquisition, condemnations, oil and gas leases and similar matters, the 1966 General Assembly authorized the creation of the position of Special Assistant Attorney General for the Department. The Legal Section, also advises the Commission on Forests and Parks and renders opinions to all divisions of the Department.

The Parks Division endeavors to provide a well-distributed and accessible system of parks throughout the State. These areas include scenic and historic sites, plus a variety of informal types of outdoor recreation. Included in the system are facilities for camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, horseback riding, and similar activities.

Last year, more than four million visitors utilized the facilities administered by the Department, from Swallow Falls in Western Maryland to Assateague on the Atlantic Coast. By 1976, the Department expects a total visitor load of twelve million persons each year. The Department also expects that this figure will zoom to twenty-five million by the year 2000, an increase of 625 percent over the present use.

At the present time, there are twenty-three State parks in full operation. Seven additional parks are open on a limited basis while they are under development and five are in the acquisition stage. Shad Landing, Martinak, Assateague, Gunpowder, Seneca Creek and Susquehanna are available to the public, but with limited facilities. Three new parks, Greenbrier, Janes Island and Gunpowder-Hammerman opened on a limited basis in 1966. In addition, the Department also made major improvements at Point Lookout, Cedarville and Assateague State Parks.

The Department has parks located in every section of the State. In Western Maryland are Cunningham Falls, Dan's Mountain, Deep