

Forest Fire in the Uttarakhand Himalaya: Problems and Solutions

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Abstract: *Cases of forest fires have become an order of the day in the mid elevation forests of the Uttarakhand Himalaya, especially the resin laden Chir Pine belt that covers the area between 1000 and 2000 metres. This overview compiles field research, satellite-monitored fire records, governmental reports to analyze the reasons why the state is affected by such frequent fire seasons, and some years unusually severe fire seasons. Human activities like agricultural burning, grazing, negligence when resin tapping, and intentionally setting fire interact with natural drivers, like pre-monsoon drought, low humidity and lightning, to cause an environment conducive to fast fire propagation. The outcomes are far beyond the area of the burnt patch itself affecting biodiversity, soil health, watershed hydrology, air quality, and livelihoods of the forest-dependent communities. Current remedies, including Forest Survey of India satellite warnings and community fire-watcher initiatives, have lessened certain losses, but have failed to address the root problem of unrelenting pine needle fuel piling. The review concludes by reflecting on strategies, which have a higher evidence base, including controlled burning, needle-based bio-briquetting, assisted regeneration of broadleaf species as well as enhanced-resourced local fire response, as potential routes towards a fire-resilient Himalayan landscape.*

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