

Preventing wildfires and protecting forests

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Modern technology, a collaborative approach, early rains and the Covid-19-induced lockdown seem to have together helped reduce forest fires in the Kundapur and Kudremukh Wildlife Divisions under the Mangaluru Circle. Forest fires here are common during every dry season between March and May, and dousing this is the priority of every forest watcher.

In 2001, forest fires had ravaged nearly 2,184.94 hectares in Kudremukh National Park (KNP). A study on the management plan for the KNP also revealed that around 150 to 200 acres of Shola grasslands get burnt during each event of fire here, and during every summer, two-thirds of the grasslands get burnt at some point in time. However, a lesser inflow of tourists and reduced human interference as a result of the pandemic have limited the forest fires to a couple of minor incidents this year.

“Though the lockdown affected the availability of workforce for active operations, we used the situation for reviving the forest.” Forest lines In January this year, forest watchers also increased the number of fire lines (a controlled burn technique beneficial in forest management) in fire-prone areas like Nemmaru, Malleshwara, Shiralu, Valikunja and mined areas in KNP.

The watchers were strategically deployed at vulnerable points which too helped in containing any major fire incident. The completely automated real-time alerts about forest fire being provided by the Forest Survey of India also assisted the department. The SMS (alerts), received right from range-level officer to chief conservator of forests, enabled swift response to emergencies like forest fire. “Once the area under threat is identified, mobilisation of task force begins easier.

In case of a minor fire, only blowers and beaters are engaged to extinguish the fire,” Reddy said. Unseasonal showers Senior forest officials added that even unseasonal showers in the area resulted in the rejuvenation of the spectacular grassland-shola complex in Kudremukh wildlife division spread over 1,300 sq km covering four districts. “The rainwater was channelised into small artificial pond-like structures dug in the forest. These prevented the dry matter from catching fire,” Reddy said. He also acknowledged the active role of local population in helping the department to keep a check on the forest

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