



Set zero forest fire goal in Odisha: Experts

16 April 2021

The forest department must set a goal of zero fires in forthcoming times. This was among the important views emerged in a webinar on forest fire held recently, organised by the RCDC and the Odisha Commons Exchange.

The motto was to understand the present situation of forest fire in Odisha, especially in the context of this having happened at greater frequency in the months of February. Forest fire in Odisha usually occurs from March to May.

And much to the surprise of many, this year the forest fire started from mid of February and the huge forest fire in the Similipal Biosphere reserve captured the attention of the national and international media with Odisha topping the list of forest fire incidents in the country. According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI), at least 5,291 forest fires were recorded in Odisha between February 22 and March 1, the highest in the country for the same period. Forest and Environment Minister Bikram Keshari Arukh informed the State Assembly recently that since January this year till date (March 24, 2021) 23,473 fire incidents have been reported in the State devouring about 159 square km of forest.

Joining the webinar, many experts on forest and environment kept their opinions as to how to effectively deal with the forest fires. Incidents of forest fire are increasing. Explaining the various causes, Prabhat Mishra told how community members have been traditionally proactive on reporting and putting out forest fires in association with workers of the Forest Department. Forest fires are more prominent in deciduous forests and maximum number of incidents occurred in south Odisha, opined RCCF Brahmspur Manoj Mahapatra. He called upon all stakeholders to cooperate in preventing and mitigating forest fires. Mahapatra pointed out how the department was taking note of community efforts and providing incentives to encourage positive changes. He sought cooperation of all to fight forest fire effectively.

The process of approving individual and community forest rights should be stepped up to enthuse the community to do more and the process of CFR management should go a long way in protecting and conserving forests, pointed out Satya Pattnaik.

He was of the opinion that capacity of all stakeholders must be strengthened and coordination must improve to address the menace. As per the satellite data, forest fire clusters are developing in certain pockets of Odisha and it is important to keep watch on them. He dwelt on the climatic factors that could be driving the fires, said Barna Baibhav Panda. The Forest Department continues to look upon the forest as a production unit.

It should change its stance and concentrate on conservation of forests with an eye towards enriching the livelihoods of the forest dwellers, said Gitanjali Sahoo, adding that the State must strengthen the Forest Department and enhance coordinated efforts. Forests are vital and all the inhabitants of the Earth should think of themselves as one community and look after the welfare of forests, said Nibedita Dash.

While Odisha excelled in achieving zero casualty in the disaster management like of cyclone ,efforts of the State Forest Department should be to achieve the goal of zero fires, opined Dr Ambika Nanda.The Forest Department should engage and involve youths in mitigating forest fires, besides sensitizing the women on forest fire and its prevention, opined Kailash Dash.

Community is moving away from viewing forests as an essential resource particularly as modern life is moving away from nature towards artificial goods like plastic and proper marketing of MFP could reverse the stance, said Kulamani Sahu.There is the need for a long term plan to mitigate forest fires keeping in view the impacts of climate change.

There is also a need to renew the interests of the community in forests and ensure their rights over resource. The community is best managers of forests and traditional ways of forest management must be renewed, said Pradeep Brahma.

Source: <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/state-editions/set-zero-forest-fire-goal-in-odisha--experts.html>