

Kerala forests register 40 percent drop in wildfire incidents

14 June 2021



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Amid the revelation of large-scale felling of protected trees from private land, forest department data shows that the forests in Kerala were greener from the ground up for the second consecutive summer with wildfire incidents recorded this year being the lowest in recent years.

Compared to 716.64 hectares last summer, 448.41 hectares of forest land was gutted this summer, registering a drop of around 40%. Previously, the state used to witness wildfires in close to 2,000 hectares of forest land every year.

According to the data collected by the forest department from the field, an extent of 448.41 hectares were gutted in wildfire with 166 incidents reported this fire season, which is usually from December 1 to May 31.

Of the 508 satellite-based fire-alerts the state received this year from the Forest Fire Alert System, a national database maintained by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun, just 166 alerts were related to fire inside the forest. The previous summer, 716.64 hectares were gutted in 382 wildfire incidents across the state.

Assistant Conservator of Forests Radhakrishnan S R told The New Indian Express that, mainly, three reasons were behind the drop in wildfire incidents in Kerala. First, the officers posted at the ground-level, including beat officers, kept a close tab on areas vulnerable to forest fire.

“We have divided the forest at the block-level to ensure meticulous surveillance in each beat. Second, the state received fairly good summer showers during the peak of summer. Third, the restrictions enforced on tourists and the lockdown announced by the state government as part of containing the Covid spread reduced human intervention in forest tracks,” he said.

Though the timber mafia used to set the forests afire in the past as part of illegal felling of trees, the practice has almost ended because of the strict surveillance of forest officials. According to green activists, the traditional illegal felling has given way to corporate felling of trees, for which there is no need to create wildfire.

The forest department has also started GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping of vulnerable areas. That would enable close monitoring during peak season, along with ensuring better enforcement measures in such areas, officials said.

Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2021/jun/14/kerala-forests-register-40-percent-drop-in-wildfire-incidents-2316024.html>