

Standing Committee Report Summary

Forest Fires in the Himalayan region, its Adverse Effects and Mitigation Measures

- The Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change (Chair: Dr Medha Vishram Kulkarni) presented its report on 'Forest Fires in the Himalayan region, its Adverse Effects and Mitigation Measures' on August 7, 2026. The Committee examined the causes and impact of forest fires, and measures on monitoring, prevention, and management. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
- **Regional variations in forest fires:** The Committee noted that forest fires are driven by different factors in the Western and Eastern Himalayas, requiring region-specific prevention measures. It also observed that there has been no dedicated study establishing the linkage between climate change and forest fires in India. In the Western Himalayas, Chir Pine is displacing ecologically valuable oak forests and account for nearly 57% of forest fire incidents. In the Eastern Himalayas, Jhum cultivation drives close to two-thirds of verified fires in Manipur. The Committee recommended: (i) region-specific forest fire prevention frameworks and research on the linkage between climate change and forest fires, and (ii) predictive risk models to inform seasonal preparedness. For Western Himalayas, it recommended: (i) dedicated oak and deodar regeneration missions, (ii) stricter scrutiny of coniferous forest diversion, (iii) pre-season collection of pine needles with a minimum procurement price and (iv) support for briquette industries. For Eastern Himalayas, it recommended: (i) incidence-linked fire-free village incentives, (ii) time-bound recruitment, (iii) a single regional action plan, and (iv) an invasive species eradication mission.
- **Impact on humans and ecology:** The Committee noted that no consolidated record exists of fire-related casualties or compensation paid to victims. It observed that this hampers accountability and evidence-based policymaking and recommended a centralised casualty and compensation database. The Committee also observed that Himalayan forests regulate groundwater recharge and spring discharge on which most of the region's population depends. It recommended development of a post-fire protocol including watershed assessment to identify affected areas, and taking-up of these areas on a priority basis under the spring-rejuvenation programmes.
- **Monitoring and early-warning systems:** The Committee noted that India depends on foreign satellites for fire monitoring. It also noted that there is a daily observation gap with no satellite pass for several hours. The Committee recommended launching a domestic geostationary satellite capable of round-the-clock coverage. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) alerts state governments and citizens about forest fires. The Committee noted that, in Uttarakhand, only about 12.5% of alerts by FSI corresponded to actual fires. It observed that high false-positive rate could lead to treatment of alerts as routine. It recommended structured training for nodal officers on interpreting and prioritising fire alerts. It further flagged that the Forest Fire Alert System (FAST) of FSI depends on citizen self-registration, leaving unregistered populations outside its reach. The Committee recommended: (i) examining integration of FAST alerts with National Disaster Management Authority's registration-free cell broadcast alert system, and (ii) collaboration with the India Meteorological Department to build its forecasting models into fire-risk early warning.
- **Disaster response capacity:** The Committee noted that the National Disaster Response Force deploys two battalions for Himalayan forest fires, and just three of the six trained teams carry formal sanction for such tasks. It recommended: (i) approving three additional teams, (ii) expanding high-altitude firefighting training, and (iii) establishing dedicated Regional Response Centres. It also recommended strengthening community participation through measures such as: (i) incentives for volunteers including insurance cover, (ii) recognition of sacred groves and community-protected forests, and (iii) mandatory school ecology education.
- **Financial assistance:** The Forest Fire Prevention and Management (FFPM) Scheme ended in 2025-26, and is currently under review. The scheme provided financial assistance to states to prevent and control forest fires. The Committee noted that its renewal is pending. It recommended: (i) expediting approval, (ii) introducing an interim funding mechanism, (iii) linking future releases to outcomes, and (iv) adequate funding through FFPM rather than use of funds meant for afforestation.
- **Legal reforms:** The Committee noted that forest law remains fragmented and still oriented toward government control rather than restoration. It also noted that India lacks a statutory definition of forest. It recommended: (i) a comprehensive review of forest law, (ii) native-species-matched compensatory afforestation with tracked survival, and (iii) notifying forest fire as a disaster under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

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