

Plans Afoot to Generate Power from Pine Needles

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There is no better way to get rid of chir trees leaves, which have emerged as one of the main reasons for the spread of wildfire in Uttarakhand.

A proposal has been made to the state government to generate electricity by using the pine leaves (called needles), which will help play vital role in providing revenue to the government and livelihood to locals.

The trees, which do not require much water to survive, have taken over 1 per cent of the total forest area in Uttarakhand as broad-leaved trees such as oak have disappeared due to excessive felling by locals.

The Uttarakhand forest department's appeal to the locals to collect pine needles free of cost from the forests has not borne fruit. Now the department is keen on the proposal of Uttarakhand Renewable Energy Development Agency (UREDA) to set up pine needles power plants across the state.

Rajender Mahajan, principal chief conservator of the forests, said, "UREDA's plan to use pine needles for churning electricity and set up micro-power plants across the villages of the state is a laudable step. The forest department will extend all its support in the endeavour."

A.K. Tyagi, director, UREDA, said that he has sent the policy draft to the state government in this regard, which he claimed is likely to be approved soon.

"There is some ten lakh metric ton pine needles lying in the forest. Taking out four lakh metric ton from it which villagers use for fuel and in keeping the animal shelter rooms warm, remaining would be able to produce 150 MW power. The villagers can turn entrepreneur as they would get huge benefit of subsidies, approximately Rs. 11 lakh from the Centre for setting up a 10KV Plant, which will cost around Rs. 15 lakh.

Setting example, an NGO, Avani Bio Energy, has successfully experimented with production of electricity from pine needles by setting up a 10 kv plant at Berinag village in Pithoragarh in 2008. Buoyed by its success, they are now planning to set up eight units of 10 KV each by March this year and, 50 units by 2018.

Founder of the organisation, Rajnish Jain, said, "The forests are replete with so much pine needles that each hill village can have ten energy plants of 10 KV each using pine needles as biomass. This one plant can give an income of Rs. 2.2.5 lakh to the entrepreneur village and an income of Rs. 600 to those who collect pine needles, as we pay them Rs. two kilo."

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