

‘Nobody Is to Blame for Uttarakhand’s Forest Fires’

Nihi Sharma

With 3,466 hectares of green cover gutted in the forest fire raging in Uttarakhand, the Dehradun-based Forest Research Institute (FRI) has plans to team up with the National Disaster Mitigation Authority (NDMA) to combat the calamity in coming years. Concerned over the severity of climate, Dr. Savita, director of the institute, talks to HT about the fire and how it can be prevented or controlled in future.

What is the cause of the unprecedented forest fire?

Generally, the state receives at least two showers in April and the actual season of forest fire starts in May. But this year, there has been no precipitation and severe dryness, due to which forest fires broke out this month.

Officials have blamed villagers and the timber mafia for starting the forest fire.

Nobody is to be blamed for the fire. Villagers believe that after burning the grassland, they get a quality crop the next season. As foresters, we reject the myth. I cannot comment on the involvement of the timber mafia.

Oak forests, which are supposed to have the most moisture, too have reported fire.

Uttarakhand did not receive sufficient rainfall during the winter. The surface of the Earth is parched and there’s no surprise that even oak forests are burning.

How has FRI decided to support this natural calamity?

I have talked to the NDMA authorities on starting workshops on combating fire. Talks are in the nascent stage and we are still preparing the draft.

What precautions should be taken before the fire season?

Fire lines should be cleared properly. Under operation control burning’ we should ensure the clearing of dry leaves and twigs.

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