

Forest fires and spring season

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In news: Forest areas in states such as Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Nagaland, Manipur Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat have been witnessing the increased forest fire since the beginning of the year 2021 and Uttarakhand is the most recent one to witness.

When did these states/regions report the forest fire?

- Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh (Kullu Valley) witnessed the prolonged fires in January
- The ongoing one in Nainital began in March-end. The Simlipal National Park in Odisha saw a major fire between February-end and early March.
- Recent fires include those in Bandhavgarh Forest Reserve in Madhya Pradesh, and in sanctuaries for the Asiatic lion and the great Indian bustard in Gujarat.

How fire-prone are India's forests?

- According to the India State of Forest Report 2019 (ISFR) released by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun, as of 2019, about 21.67% (7,12,249 sq km) of the country's geographical area is identified as forest

HOW FIRE-PRONE ARE FORESTS?

Forest fire-prone-class ■ Extreme ■ Veryhigh ■ High ■ Moderate ■ Less



ALL INDIA

Source : ISFR 2019



UTTARAKHAND

Source : ISFR 2019/Uttarakhand

- **Extremely prone:** As per FSI, forests of the Northeast and central India regions are the most vulnerable areas to forest fires. Forests in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura have been identified as 'extremely prone' to forest fire
- **Very highly prone:** States with large forest areas under the 'very highly prone' category include Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- **New extremely prone forests:** According to an annual report of MoEFCC, Western Maharashtra, Southern Chhattisgarh and areas of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, along with central Odisha, are turning into 'extremely prone' forest fire hotspots
- Areas under the 'highly prone' and 'moderately prone' categories make up about 26.2% of the total forest cover a whopping 1,72,374 sq km.

Vulnerability of Forests in Uttarakhand

The FSI has identified forests along the south, west and southwest regions of Uttarakhand – comprising Dehradun, Hardwar, Garhwal, Almora, Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar, Champawat districts as being prone to varying intensities of forest fires.

Reasons for forest fire

Forest fires can be caused by a number of natural causes and Man-made causes. Following are the reasons for forest fires in general, India in particular:

- **Special case of Uttarakhand:** The forest fires have been more frequent than usual in Uttarakhand and have also taken place during winter; dry soil caused by a weak monsoon is being seen as one of the causes.
- **Man made:**
 - Forest officials say most fires are man-made, sometimes even deliberately caused
 - For instance, in Odisha, which saw a major fire last month in Simlipal forest, villagers are known to set dry leaves to fire in order to collect mahua flowers, which go into preparation of a local drink.
 - **Climate change:** Emerging studies link climate change to rising instances of fires globally, especially the massive fires of the Amazon forests in Brazil and in Australia in the last two years.
- **Natural causes:**
 - In India, forest fires are most commonly reported during March and April, when the ground has large quantities of dry wood, logs, dead leaves, stumps, dry grass and weeds that can make forests easily go up in flames if there is a trigger.
 - Under natural circumstances, extreme heat and dryness, friction created by rubbing of branches with each other also have been known to initiate fire.