

Simple Explanation of the Article

The article highlights the growing threat of forest fires, both in India and globally, and discusses their causes, impact, and possible solutions. It emphasizes that while India has policies to manage forest fires, more effort is needed, particularly in funding, technology, and community involvement.

Salient Points

1. The Growing Threat of Forest Fires

- Wildfires recently devastated **Los Angeles**, causing destruction and displacement.
- In **India**, **over 36% of forests** are prone to fires.
- **Forest fire incidents have increased 10 times in 20 years**, while forest cover has increased by only **1.12%**.

2. Causes of Forest Fires

- **90% of fires are human-caused** – due to land clearing, slash-and-burn farming, and careless behavior.
- Climate change, **rising temperatures**, and **long dry spells** make forests more vulnerable.

3. Impact of Forest Fires

- **Environmental:** Loss of trees, wildlife, biodiversity, and increased carbon emissions.
 - **India emits ~69 million tonnes of CO2 annually** from forest fires.
- **Economic:** Loss of timber and non-timber products, affecting communities.
 - **Annual economic loss due to forest degradation (including fires): ₹1.74 lakh crore.**
- **Social:** Displacement of wildlife, human-wildlife conflicts, water cycle disruption, and soil degradation.

4. Existing Government Efforts

- **National Action Plan on Forest Fires** and **Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FFPMS)** assist states in fire control.

5. Challenges in Fire Management

- **Funding issues:** The FFPMS budget fluctuates, ranging from ₹28 crore to ₹51 crore in recent years.
- **Technology gaps:** Current fire alert systems **cannot differentiate between forest fires and other fires**, causing delays in response.

6. Solutions and Recommendations

- **Technology Upgrades:**

- **Advanced predictive modelling** to identify fire-prone areas.
 - **Drones with thermal imaging** to monitor and guide firefighting.
 - **Data integration** from various agencies like the Forest Survey of India and ISRO.
 - **Community Involvement:**
 - Using **mobile apps, SMS alerts, and helplines** for fire reporting.
 - Encouraging self-help groups (like women collecting pine needles in Uttarakhand).
 - Learning from **Nepal's Community Forest User Groups** and **Indonesia's Fire-Free Village Program**.
 - Engaging youth as '**forest fire scouts**'.
 - **Policy & Infrastructure:**
 - **Consistent budget allocation** for fire management.
 - Training and equipping local responders.
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Key Takeaway

Forest fires are a major **environmental, economic, and social issue**. Addressing them requires **policy improvements, better funding, advanced technology, and active community participation**. While India has made efforts, more needs to be done to prevent and manage these disasters effectively.