

# **FRI to Study Damage Caused by Fire-Prone Chir Pines to Forests**

*Seema Sharma*

The Forest Research Institute (FRI) is set to study chir pine trees which are found in abundance in both Garhwal and Kumaun divisions and have been blamed for easy spread of forest fires in the state.

FRI scientists will prepare a report on the damage caused to the state forests due to chir pines. The report will then be sent to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Once the report receives approval by the ministry the plan is to submit it before the Supreme Court to seek permission to fell chir trees.

The scientists have also suggested planting miscellaneous varieties of trees in the burnt forests to curb spread of chir pines.

Omveer Singh, head of the Silviculture Section at FRI, said, "As and when the soil is conducive for germination of new plants, we can sow trees of miscellaneous varieties, especially those with broad leaves to stop chir pines from taking over the forests."

According to some estimates, there are approximately three crore tonnes of pine leaves lying collected in the forests of the state which have not been cleared in the past four years. These dried needles, filled with resin, are highly combustible. "The villagers have been permitted to use the leaves for various purposes," a forest official said.

The chir pine trees, which do not require much water to survive, have taken over 17 per cent of the total forest area in the state as broad-leaved trees such as oak have disappeared due to excessive felling by locals.

"No grass or plants can grow under chir. It is also not edible for wildlife," said S.K. Chandola, former principal chief conservator of forests. He said that expensive resin is extracted from the chir which is why many villages are found settled in the area where the trees grow, usually at a height of 1,500 to 2,000 ft.

Chandola added that pine monoculture is bad for good health of forests. Instead, mixed vegetation which includes grass, shrubs, broad-leaved trees such as oak, rhododendum, kafal, and timla should be grown in the forests.

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