

How Uttarakhand govt is focusing on increasing green cover through traditional green festival Harela

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Uttarakhand education minister Arvind Pandey planting a tree in Almora district as part of plantation drive ahead of Harela festival.

With the aim of increasing green cover in urban spaces, the Uttarakhand government will be celebrating Harela festival this year. The Dehradun district administration is planning to plant 2.75 lakh plants in an hour's time on July 16.

Harela, which means 'Day of Green', is a green festival celebrated in Uttarakhand and some regions of Himachal Pradesh. The Shravan Harela is celebrated on the first day of Shravan month of Hindu calendar (late July).

People in the Himalayan state consider it highly auspicious for starting the sowing cycle in their fields.

Ashish Srivastava, district magistrate of Dehradun on Tuesday reviewed the preparations by the block development officer and deputy district magistrates for the comprehensive tree plantation campaign.

"Plantation drive should be carried out as per the plan and in areas, it will be easy for people to participate in the plantation drive. The target of planting 2.75 lakhs in the district should be achieved, rather we should try to plant more trees," said Srivastava.

He further directed officials that the focus should not only be on fulfilling the target of the plantation drive but special care should be given to the safety and survival of the saplings after the plantation drive.

As per the last two surveys conducted by the Forest Survey of India, over a period of four years from 2015 to 2019, Uttarakhand has not managed to report even an increase of 1% forest cover in the state.

Uttarakhand reported an increase of a mere 8.04 sq km of forests as per the India State of Forest Report 2019, released by the Forest Survey of India in December last year.

The India State of Forest Report 2017, released by the union ministry of environment and forests in February 2018, showed that only a marginal increase of 23 sq km forest cover was reported in Uttarakhand since 2015.

The report of 2017 showed a meagre increase of 165 sq km in very dense forest and 636 sq km in other forest categories, while the moderate dense forest diminished with a difference of 778 sq km, leaving the total cover in state to 24,295 sq km.

As per the 2019 report the districts of Haridwar, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar reported a negative result of -2.75sq km, -6.44 sq km and -4.21sq km decrease in forest areas with respect to the assessment done by Forest Survey of India in 2017.

The district of Uttarkashi had reported the highest increase in forest cover in the state with an increase of 8 sq km of forest area. In Dehradun, forest cover increased by 3.69 sq km.

Many factors including forest fires and development work have contributed to a loss of green cover in Uttarakhand. Since the formation of the state in 2000, over 44,554 hectares of the forest area has been damaged according to an RTI reply.

Ajay Singh Rawat, a state-based environmentalist feels that the green cover has been reducing in the state due to massive construction activities including making of new roads which have resulted in massive tree felling.

“Thousands of trees have been felled for the Chardham All Weather Road that is being built in the state. Apart from this rampant construction work is being undertaken in the state which is being done through elephant corridors, affecting not just forest cover but wildlife movement also,” said Rawat.

Meanwhile, in June, Uttarakhand forest department issued an order directing forest officials to involve members of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) in plantation drives across the state, especially on Van Mohatsav and Harela.

RBS Rawat, RSS’ provincial head and convenor of environment and water conservation in Uttarakhand, said that the organisation has been carrying out green activities like protection of the environment and water resources across the state and will continue to do so.

“This time we joined hands with the forest department so that we can do so effectively on a much larger scale across the state. We wrote to the state forest department that we have 2500 ‘paryavaran praharis’ (environment guardians) across the state who can contribute immensely in these drives. I am happy that the state forest department has readily agreed to this. This is a good initiative meant to increase the green cover in the state,” said Rawat, who after his retirement as PCCF Uttarakhand, joined RSS.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/dehradun/how-uttarakhand-govt-is-focusing-on-increasing-green-cover-through-traditional-green-festival-harela/story-BHbsL7NglcWSheZt8ONTDO.html>