

Odisha CM asks officials to plan for reducing forest fire cases

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Bhubaneswar, May 12 (IANS): Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday asked forest department officials to prepare an integrated plan for significant reduction in forest fire incidents.

Issues such as human-elephant conflict, trafficking of wildlife and the incidents of forest fires are key concerns where we need to prepare an integrated plan with a focussed approach for significant reduction in such cases, Patnaik said while inaugurating a conference of divisional forest officers (DFOs) here.

He has also asked the forest officers to prepare a concrete roadmap for improving the health of state forests and enhancing the living standards of the forest fringe villagers.

"In spite of the difficult situation due to the pandemic, our forest cover has improved in the last two years as per India State of Forests Report- 2021," said the Chief Minister.

"We have added the highest number of mangrove forests in the country and third highest in total increase of forest cover between 2019 and 2021. This has been possible due to constant support of our people, the Vana Surakhya Samiti (VSS) members and tireless effort of forest staff in the field", he said.

Calling upon the officials to work towards continuing this trend in the years to come, he said that afforestation is a key component for providing employment to people in forest fringe villages. Patnaik advised the officials to rope in women Self Help Groups (SHGs) for raising seedlings for the forest department.

He urged the plantation programmes under the 5T Initiative. This would bring transparency, timeliness and encourage teamwork among all stakeholders, he added.

"Many of our forestry programmes such as joint forest management, and the Odisha Forestry Sector Development Project have been successful in providing livelihoods and empowering the local communities," he stated.

He expressed happiness over Odisha becoming a leading state in harnessing digital technology in forest management.

Speaking on the occasion, state Forest Minister Bikram Keshari Arukha said that the department has successfully reduced incidents of forest fires by 50 per cent this year in comparison to previous year.