

Editorial

Nepal's forest fires have escalated from seasonal events to a recurring hazard, with more than 34,700 incidents recorded since 2008. While hotter and drier conditions elevate fire weather risks, impacts are amplified by institutional fragmentation and weak incentives for prevention and response. Post 2015 federal restructuring has delegated authority across different government tiers, though the clarity of roles and responsibilities and the outcomes is still a question. On the other hand, contributions of local communities and community-based response to forest fires have largely remained voluntary, that is compounded by lack of tools and capacity, thus posing risks to lives and property. A shift from episodic suppression to risk-based stewardship is required, centered on a clarified operational command structure, dedicated preparedness financing, and formal recognition of community's role as an essential service. Effective fire management in federal Nepal demands clearly delineated roles across a range of actors. Nevertheless, a well-established, operational chain of command remains absent. In practice, overlapping mandates can leave municipalities accountable for outcomes but constrained in both authority and resources. To address these concerns, this special issue of the Journal of Forest and Livelihood brings together interdisciplinary research and perspectives on forest fire management, highlighting the key issues, challenges, and emerging approaches in the Nepalese context.

The article by Adhikari *et al.* draws on the lessons from 136 local administrative units of Madhesh province to analyse municipal fire counts using a linear model. The authors make a case for accounting for spatial heterogeneity in improved forest fire risk mapping across the lowlands of Nepal. Similarly, using a mixed method approach, Bhattarai and Pandey examine the forest fire incidences, spatial risk patterns, causes and management practices in Bagmati province. They highlight limited resources, weak coordination and lack of early warning systems as major constraints to effective forest fire response, despite the presence of community forest institutions.

Drawing on primary data from interviews and spatial data analysed through GIS and remote sensing, Sharma *et al.* document the seasonal and spatial fire risk in Lumbini province. They underline the need for increased funding and training in early warning systems to support sustainable forest management in the region.

Increasing forest fires is closely attributed to decline in forest-people interaction in recent decades. Building on this argument, Parajuli *et al.* argue on the need to build up on the lessons and practices of community engagement as a pathway to sustainable forest fire management in Nepal highlighting the need for enabling policies and a strategic framework for collaborative governance in the sustainable management of forest fires across the Nepalese landscape.

While human interaction with forests has been closely linked to rising forest fire incidents in Nepal, economic and institutional factors are equally important in shaping forest management outcomes. Rai argues that the absence of incentive mechanisms leading to lack of forest management, has contributed to increasing forest fires in Nepal. He argues for aligning forest fire management with incentive structures to ensure sustainable forest management in Nepal.

In similar line, Shrestha *et al.* examine the shift toward incentive-based management taking the case of pilot project implemented in community forests. They argue for a transition from a volunteerism approach to incentive-based approaches, and call for corresponding policy alignment in support of sustainable forest fire management.

Ojha and Koirala examine the policy and institutional evolution of forest fire management in Nepal across federal, provincial, and local governance levels. Their review reveals that forest fire governance in Nepal continues to face challenges arising from institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, and uneven implementation capacity despite recent policy advancements. The article highlights the importance of strengthening governance coherence, improving institutional preparedness, and supporting community-based approaches for effective forest fire management in the country.

Hill and Shrestha explore the legal and institutional ambiguities that have hindered effective forest fire management in Nepal proposing a standardised and expertise-based command structure that builds on the existing community forestry structure to address prevailing challenges in national fire management.

Finally, drawing on the disaster risk reduction principles and lessons from New South Wales, Australia, Bhattarai *et al.* analyse and propose an anticipatory approach to forest fire risk governance. This perspective paper contextualises Nepal's federal governance structure and community forestry institutions within a multi-level governance framework for fire risk management.