

## Shrine Board preparing GIS based Forest Management Plan

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On the directions of Governor N. N. Vohra, (Chairman of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board), the CEO and his officers are preparing a GIS based Forest Management Plan (with 10 years perspective) for the entire Shrine Board area, to enable its scientific development and efficient management. The Governor reviewed functioning of the forestry programmes with the CEO today. Ajeet Kumar Sahu, Chief Executive Officer, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board informed that in addition to the large scale afforestation being undertaken by the Shrine Board under its Greening Action Plan, the Board's Forest Wing is also enforcing varied measures to effectively prevent forest fires, as per scientifically approved practices which include creation of fire lines, particularly adjoining Adhkuwari, Hathimatha, Bhawan, Bhairon and other Shrine areas, removal of lantana weed from the affected areas and ensuring strict vigil on the ground during the potential forest fire season by deploying a sufficient number of fire watchers in the sensitive sectors. These activities, closely monitored by senior officers, have resulted in there being not a single forest fire incident during summer 2015 as against 12 fire incidents in summer 2014. Side by side, to prevent soil erosion and landslides in the Shrine area, engineering and non-engineering works such as construction of check dams, dry stone rubble masonry dams, percolation ponds and other steps are also being undertaken by the Forest Wing of the Board. In order to enlarge awareness regarding the importance of preservation of the environment and ecology and enhancing the green cover, the Shrine Board, in association with certain NGOs, has been conducting environmental awareness campaigns and organising plantation drives in the Shrine area and at Katra. During the last monsoon season a major plantation drive was organised by the CEO in Katra town. The Shrine Board has also approached the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM), Jammu, for plantation of aromatic species along the tracks to improve the ambience of the pilgrims undertaking the Yatra. The IIIM has been asked to take over some of the Vatikas on trial basis for planting suitable species on a project mode basis. It is pertinent to mention that, for securing scientific and productive management of its forest lands, the Shrine Board has set up a Forest Wing under a senior Indian Forest Service officer and a staff of 74 which has been making sustained efforts to enhance the forest wealth in the Trikuta Hills area with the Shrine Board.

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