

Tuesday, Solwezi (19th March, 2024)



NORTH WESTERN PROVINCE ENTERS RED ZONE REGARDING WILD FIRES - CBU PROF

Copperbelt University -CBU- Professor from the School of Natural Resources, Gillian Kabwe, says the cherished North Western Province which is well covered in vegetation has unfortunately entered a red zone regarding unprescribed wild fires.

President Hakainde Hichilema recently called for action to end unprescribed wild fire because of the negative effects on biodiversity and Climate Change.

The Professor said according to Southern African Science Service Centre for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management - SASSCAL Data and Information Portal, North Western Province is categorised in the red zone indicating that the region has a high percentage of burns per year.

In her presentation dubbed Bush/ Forest Fires in Zambia, Prof. Kabwe said over 60% of total land mass in Zambia is forested of which 9.6% is gazetted forests.

She said less than 70% of the Country is designated as State Land where Government can issue title deeds adding that the rest of the Country is designated as customary land.

Prof. Kabwe said 25% of the Country is subjected to fires every year with protected areas such as Forests and National Parks being some of the most frequently burnt areas in the Country.

She said there is no single institution with an overall mandate to manage wild fires in Zambia, though the Zambia National Parks and Wildlife and the Forestry Department have some responsibility.

This came to light at a Traditional Leaders Caucus on Ending Forest Fires, organised by Centre for Environment Justice -CEJ- in Solwezi District, North Western Province.

Prof. Kabwe said reasons advanced by communities for burning are for agricultural purposes, protection against wild animals, forest regeneration, burning to get potash from trees, hunting and poaching.

"Late burning happens because most Zambians use grass thatched houses meaning that they have to wait for grass to grow before they cut it to roof their houses then burn the rest. Others burn late because they have to wait for August to harvest their crops then burn fields. In areas where there are caterpillars, the common practice is to burn to enable eggs to develop more so that they can harvest more caterpillars especially that there is demand from markets. They burn for caterpillars especially in Central Province around August/ September which is already late burning. Depending on the time the burning is done, the frequency, severity, fuel loads, seasonality and the climate can have effects on the forests. Fire destroys vegetation and this is the right time to protect what we have to prevent mini deserts. Most of the timber concessions are in North Western Province. Foreigners come to North Western Province for timber because you kept the trees well but if you use fire continuously, you will be reducing annual increment resulting in reduced income. There are tools that can be used to monitor forest fires to reduce the rate of uncontrolled bush fires," she said.

The Forest Expert said according to SASSCAL, North Western Province is already in red zone which entails that most people burn forests late in July, August and September which is not a good time for burning.

"North Western Province which is currently well covered in vegetation may not be feeling the impact now but might struggle just as Eastern, Southern and Western Provinces are feeling it. We risk going the same route if nothing is done," she said.

The CBU Professor said there are legal frameworks that can be used in the management of wild fire such as the Environmental Management Act, the Forest Act, Wildlife Act and the Disaster Management Act.

Meanwhile, Senior Chief Sailunga of the Lunda people of Mwinilunga said people with timber concession licences and those with exploration licences are burning forests uncontrollably in his Chiefdom.

Among the Chiefs in attendance was Dr. Chief Mumena of Kalumbila District, Senior Chief Sailunga, Chief Kakoma (Representative) as well as Chief Ntambu all from Mwinilunga District.

Others are Chief Lumpuma of Lufwanyama District, Chief Musaka, Chief Mulonga (Representative), Senior Chief Kalilele (Representative) and Chieftainess Chikola of Mushindamo District and Chief Kapijimpanga (Representative) of Solwezi District.

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