

NEWS & VIEWS

Revival of one of the burnt tea fields



Fig. 1. Tea garden in January 2006.



Fig. 2. The same tea garden in June 2012 – approx. 6 years later – Damage caused by fire.

Tea Gardens in Pine Forests are Prone to Damage by Forest Fire in Uttarakhand

Tea cultivation in Uttarakhand (a mountainous state in north India) dates back to about 150 years. Despite its glorious past, tea industry in this region faced steady decline due to falling production levels, lack of expert labour, increased operational costs and several socio-economic and political reasons (see Negi GCS & Bisht V. 2012. *International Journal of Tea Science* 8(3): 21–29). In 1987, the Uttarakhand State Government decided to reintroduce tea in Uttarakhand hills by taking uncultivable farmlands, community wastelands on lease, and reviving abandoned tea gardens of the past. Thus far, ~700 ha land has been put under tea cultivation, mostly in the small grower's land employing ~1,500 local labourers, of which women represent 60%. This venture has not only resulted in income and employment generation but

also attempts to address the problem of rehabilitation of wasteland and soil erosion. Despite Government efforts to bring back the past glorious history of tea cultivation in Uttarakhand, several agro-climatic constraints come in the way of tea farming such as inadequate rainfall during winter and long dry spell during summer, small holdings of farmers and limited stretches of well-drained fertile acidic soils, *etc.* Forest fire has always been a threat, more so now, particularly for tea plantations in the region in areas either in the vicinity of forests or underneath the tree canopy (see Figs. 1 and 2), particularly pine forests.

G.C.S. Negi

*G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and
Development
Kosi-Katarmal, Almora, Uttarakhand, India*