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**Is the Forest Fire adjacent to St. Clair's Waterfall Natural or Man-made?**

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**Abstract**

Forest fires have been showing an increasing trend in Sri Lanka over the past few years. Previous studies proved that most of the forest fires in Sri Lanka were caused by human factors. The main objective of this study is to identify the causes of forest fires in close areas of St. Clair's fall, which is situated on the western slope of the Central Highlands and to investigate the impacts and measures to reduce forest fires. Primary data as well as secondary data were used for this study. Primary data was obtained through a questionnaire survey and focused group interviews from the study area of Hollyrood, Wattedoda, and Dewon GN Division. Twenty (20) households have been interviewed from the random sampling. Focused group interviews were held with the Nuwara Eliya Forest Conservation Department, Tea Estate companies and Thalawakele Police Station. Rainfall and temperature data were taken as secondary data for the period from 2010 to 2020 from the Department of Meteorology, Colombo. 83 respondents stated that forest fires occurs from January to April because of the high temperature and low rainfall recorded in these months. Patana grasslands are spared on the lower slopes of the left and right banks of waterfall area and plantation forest and Tea plantation have spread in the higher part of the slope. According to the Forest Department, the understory of *Patana grassland* and undergrowth for forest plantations are exposures to fire in this area. 96 respondents stated that forest fires are purposely started by the people to catch fish from the Kothmale Oya, build bonfire on the rock, and burn fish. Fires are generated through those flames. 63 stated that forest fires are done for "jungle based feedings" for cattle herds by the people in the Thalawakele plantation settlement. They expect fresh grass to boom in the rainy seasons by setting fires in the dry season. 22 respondents stated that forest fires are purposely done for hunting purposes. Most of the fires occur on the left bank of the Kothmale Oya River. In order to prevent fires in this area, the fire breaks fire belt and such as corridors without and with floras are established as buffer zones on the right bank. This fire belt is maintain by Thalawakele Plantation Company. When a forest fire occurs, the Forest Department sends the SMS message to alert the community. Planting *hana* trees as a green belt can be recommended to reduce the occurrence of fires in this area.

**Keywords:** Central Highlands, Random sampling, Bonfire, Hana trees