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Poverty behind Badakhshan forest loss

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KUNDUZ CITY (PAN): Wood has been systematically cut for sale and use as fuel at homes in the mountains covered northern Badakhshan province, something contributing to its environmental destruction and deforestation.

Badakhshan's plant cover is estimated at spread over 30,000 hectares of land. Gada Mohammad, who lives in Yaftal Payan district, said he and his friends have long been cutting trees and transferred them on donkeys to the provincial capital for sale.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News they collected woods in autumn from mountains and sold seven kilograms of wood for 50 afghanis in winter.

Mohammad, who keeps hundreds of kilograms of woods at home, said most of residents were involved in tree cutting to earn money as a matter of survival in the face of extreme poverty.

"I don't know if wood cut harms environment because I am illiterate. For me, the only important thing is money." He said no one in his family had a job and he himself fed his family of seven. "I have no option, but to cut wood and sell it," he said.

Deputy police chief Col. Sakhi Dad Haidari said the days were gone when people would illegally cut forests and hunt wild animals. He said police allowed no one to cut trees or hunt birds.

The police official said President Hamid Karzai had banned cutting forests and hunting wild animals through a presidential decree addressed to all government officials concerned.

He said the decree suggested punishment to violators in line with relevant laws.

Agriculture and Livestock Director Mohammad Alim Alimi said efforts were underway in cooperation with security forces to prevent illegal forests cutting and preserve wildlife.

He said 50 percent forests in Badakhshan were lost to the decades long war in the country.

Environmental protection director Mohammad Nabi claimed the rhythm of deforestation in Badakhshan had slowed down, compared to the past. "The development has a positive impact on the environment," he added.