

Editorial

Chopping Russian Poplars will Cause Ecological Disaster

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Russian poplars are backbone to the economy of Kashmiri farmers since they were introduced in Kashmir by World Bank in 1982 with the reason they mature quickly as compared to native species. These trees have protected large part of the forest cover in Kashmir over the years as they supplied wood for the construction purpose and saves about 300,000 cubic feet of conifer timber annually in Kashmir (Wani et al., 2021). They have maintained ecological balance as well. They have protected larger area of land from desertification and soil erosion and provided shelter to innumerable birds and insects over the decades (Fig. 1). They are also used for making the crates for exporting different fruits from Kashmir to other states. They may have additional benefits for the maintenance of environment that is yet to be counted by the researchers of Kashmir valley. However, in Kashmir last few years it is seen as public nuisance, as there is a fear that pollens from these trees may cause allergy (Dar, 2013), however, data is insufficient and it is well established fact that female trees do not

shed pollens but its male species do so an order circulated by Kashmir administration, dated 2 April 2020, to cut down poplar trees that may lead to economic and ecological crisis. There is lack of data supporting that the Russian poplars are causing allergies to people and if they are causing so, how much population is affected by them. There is no data that has confirmed any death due to Russian poplars in Kashmir valley. It is very unfortunate that these Russian poplars have been linked with COVID -19 without any authentic data. May be, cotton tufts released by female poplars will act as carriers if, COVID -19 pandemic will not stop. There is no

scientific data available that has claimed that female poplars are cause of respiratory infections in valley. A study in China and Hungarian city has claimed that pollens may contain allergens, and will affect 6.8% of hay fever patients (Zhang et al., 2015).

Cutting down of popular trees at one time may cause ecological and economic disaster that must be kept in mind. Researchers should come forward to identify the real problem. If it is a health hazard, we must cut down these trees in a phased manner. The areas where tress will be chopped off must have a plan to plant that number of trees within a quick period of time. Cutting down lakhs of trees in one go



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will cause such a damage that will not be covered over the decades. It may lead to deforestation, soil erosion, change temperature of that area and it will be difficult for the organisms to survive in that area and similar other problems. We must understand land clearings are considered destruction of that ecosystem. We must think scientifically before moving ahead with this decision or we may have to be ready for an irreparable ecological disaster. There mechanisms to deal with cotton tufts during this season need to be explored and people must be encouraged to use masks in areas with high popular density (Wani et al., 2021).

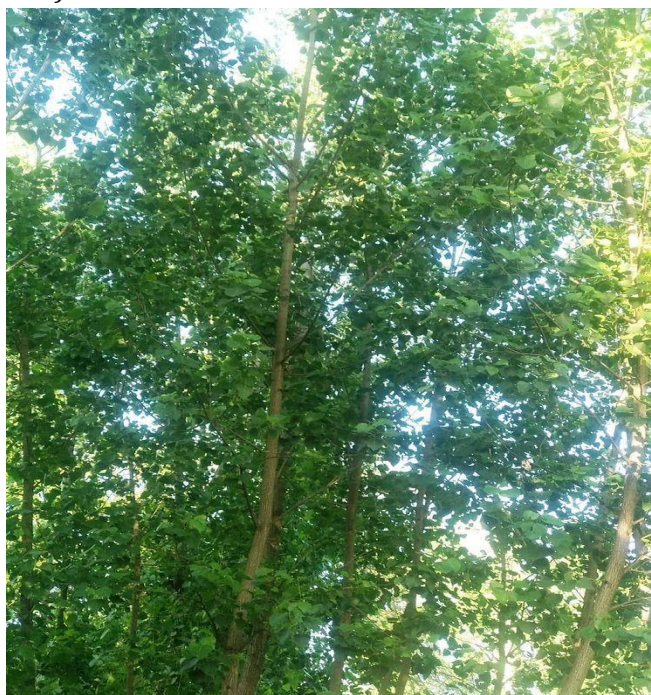


Fig. 1 A capture of Populus at Naina, Pulwama, Kashmir by the author

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