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## Korea to launch satellite to monitor mountain fires

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Korea's government agency for forests is launching a satellite to more effectively contain natural disasters in mountain areas as well as to monitor the ecological conditions of forests in real-time, according to the head of the Korea Forest Service (KFS), Wednesday.

KFS Minister Nam Sung-hyun said at a press conference in Sejong City that the satellite will provide vital information for the agency's soon-to-be-completed (June) data center, now under construction in eastern Seoul, with new optic data every day so that the authority can check for early signs of mountain fires or landslides and any meaningful change to mountain forest conditions.

The satellite can also automatically detect the start of a mountain fire by zooming in on an area smaller than 0.5 hectares (5,000 square meters). Once a blaze begins, the

satellite can even quickly predict the estimated area of fire damage.

The satellite, now under construction and with a 307 billion won (\$231 million) budget, is scheduled to be launched into space in the first half of next year. Jointly developed by the KFS and the Rural Development Administration, both under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the satellite will monitor the country's wooded regions with a 120 kilometer-wide range at least once every day at an orbit of 880 kilometers high.

"It used to take 30 days to get a complete picture of the country's mountain forests and analyze their conditions," Nam said. "The satellite will shorten the period to three days. The range of the monitoring will also increase 10 times more than before."

The satellite will also enable the authority to monitor forests in other countries. This feature will allow



Minister of Korea Forest Service Nam Sung-hyun  
Courtesy of Korea Forest Service

the agency to have advantages when dealing with other countries as it forms global partnerships or when it comes to planning an international measure regarding carbon neutrality.

The KFS is also working on 27 key technologies that take advantage of the satellite's capabilities to more effectively monitor the country's mountain forests. The authority said that such efforts are timely

as the country has been seeing a rise in major mountain fire threats, which are caused by climate change such as a dry atmosphere.

The satellite's anticipated launch comes as the KFS is trying to bring its mountain forest management capabilities in line with advanced countries, like Germany. Comparing the satellite to a "global standard," the minister said Germany and other European countries are using their own satellites to digitally analyze their national forests.

"Our new satellite will be the country's new eye to watch not just our mountain forests that take up 63 percent of our entire land, but also the whole Korean Peninsula and countries we have formed a partnership with under the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization," Nam said.

"Together with the data coming from our research bases on land, we will be able to introduce a digital forest management system that's more scientific and accurate."