Monitoring and mapping forest fires in the south-western Indian Ocean using very high resolution optical imagery

Christophe Révillion, Thibault Catry

To cite this version:

Christophe Révillion, Thibault Catry. Monitoring and mapping forest fires in the south-western Indian Ocean using very high resolution optical imagery. Pléiades Days, Apr 2014, Toulouse, France. 2014. hal-01475838

HAL Id: hal-01475838
https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-01475838
Submitted on 24 Feb 2017

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1) The South-western Indian Ocean is characterized by various heterogeneous insular territories. Many of these islands are biodiversity hotspots and in order to preserve this heritage, some of them are protected.

2) In 2013, the monitoring and mapping of the fires of Etang-Saint-Paul (July, La Reunion) and Europa (June) were carried out by the SEAS-OI (Survey of Environment Assisted by Satellites in the Indian Ocean), in collaboration with the ONF (Office National des Forêts) of La Reunion and the SDIS (Service Départemental d’Incendie et de Secours), using high resolution SPOT 5 imagery. These maps allowed the estimation of the fire extent, to about 4 and 70 hectares for Europa and Etang-Saint-Paul respectively, and to support field intervention during the crisis.

3) The monitoring of the post-fire recovery was realized using Pléiades images. Very high spatial resolution images allowed us to understand more precisely how different plant groupings recovered after the fire. On the pond of Saint-Paul vegetation dominated by Cyperus Papyrus (in dark green on map) is almost back to its pre-fire condition in six months, however areas with Typha domingensis began to regenerate but much more slowly.

4) This study was part of the operational mission of the SEAS-OI station, gathering local actors in the management of forest fire crisis in the south-western Indian Ocean. In particular, we demonstrate here the interest of the satellite approach in the management of natural disasters on remote territories like Europa island, and in protected area where a rapid response is needed. Thanks to the combination of optical SPOT 5 and Pléiades high resolution products, SEAS-OI was able to provide operational products for the management of these fires, and the monitoring of.

www.seas-oi.org
Contacts : christophe.revillion@ird.fr, contact@seas-oi.org, http://www.espace.ird.fr/