Asia-Pacific Forest Sector Outlook

Session I: Online expert workshop

Day 1 - Roadmap for primary forests conservation

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DIVERSITY AND STATUS OF PRIMARY FORESTS IN INDIA

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Status Primary Forests in India: Introduction

Forests in Hindu Kush Himalaya cover 25.36% (Total Geog. Area 4.3 Million km^2). Barring Bhutan, China and India, deforestation rate – ve!

Forests closely intertwined with the socio-economic and cultural lives of people living within and on the fringes of forests. Increasingly urban populations show concerns on green cover loss.

Burgeoning basic human needs of food, water and energy etc. and macro development initiatives are not matched by current condition of residual of primary forests, forest management practices or forest ecosystem thinking of policymakers.

The Indian State of Forest Report is conducted biennially since 1987. Total Forest cover in India is approximately 21.6% (712 249 km^2) of the total geographical area (ISFR-20I9).

Despite an increase of forest cover by 3976 km^2 since 2017, all potential regions of primary forests (Bio-Hotspots) shows ongoing degradation and deforestation.

Indian State of Forest Report 1987

	1972-75	*1980-82*	*(Area in sq. km.) Change*
Total Forest Cover	555180	463470	(-) 91710
Total Forest Cover As Percentage of the Total Geographical Area	16.89%	14.10%	(-) 2.79%
Closed Forest	464226	360229	(-) 103997
Closed Forests As Percentage of the Total Geographical Area	14.12%	10.96%	(-) 3.16%
Open/Degraded Forests	87673	100592	(+) 12919
Open/Degraded Forests As Percentage of the Total Geographical Area	2.67%	3.06%	(+) 0.39%
Mangrove Forests	3281	2649	(-) 632
Mangrove Forests As Percentage of the Total Geographical Area	0.099%	0.081%	(-) 0.018%

Forest Cover in Mountain/Hilly States in 1987

States/UTs	*Total Geographical Area*	*Close Forest*	*Open Forest*	*Total Forest Area*	*Scrub*	*Non-Forest Area*
J&K	222240	12978	7902	20880	2441	198919
West Bengal (Darjeeling)	3256	1316	16	1332		1924
Himachal Pradesh	55670	9908	2974	**12882**	2448	40390
UP	51125	13713	7319	21032	501	29592
Arunachal Pradesh	83580	51096	9404	**60500**	122	22958
Nagaland	16530	6379	7992	**14351**	31	2148
Mizoram	21090	2938	16154	**19092**		1998
Manipur	22360	4670	13009	**17679**	850	3831
Meghalaya	22490	5749	10762	**16511**	171	5808
Sikkim	7300	1867	972	2839	400	4061
Total	505641	110614	76484	107098	6964	311579
%	100	21.88	15.12	37	1.38	61.62

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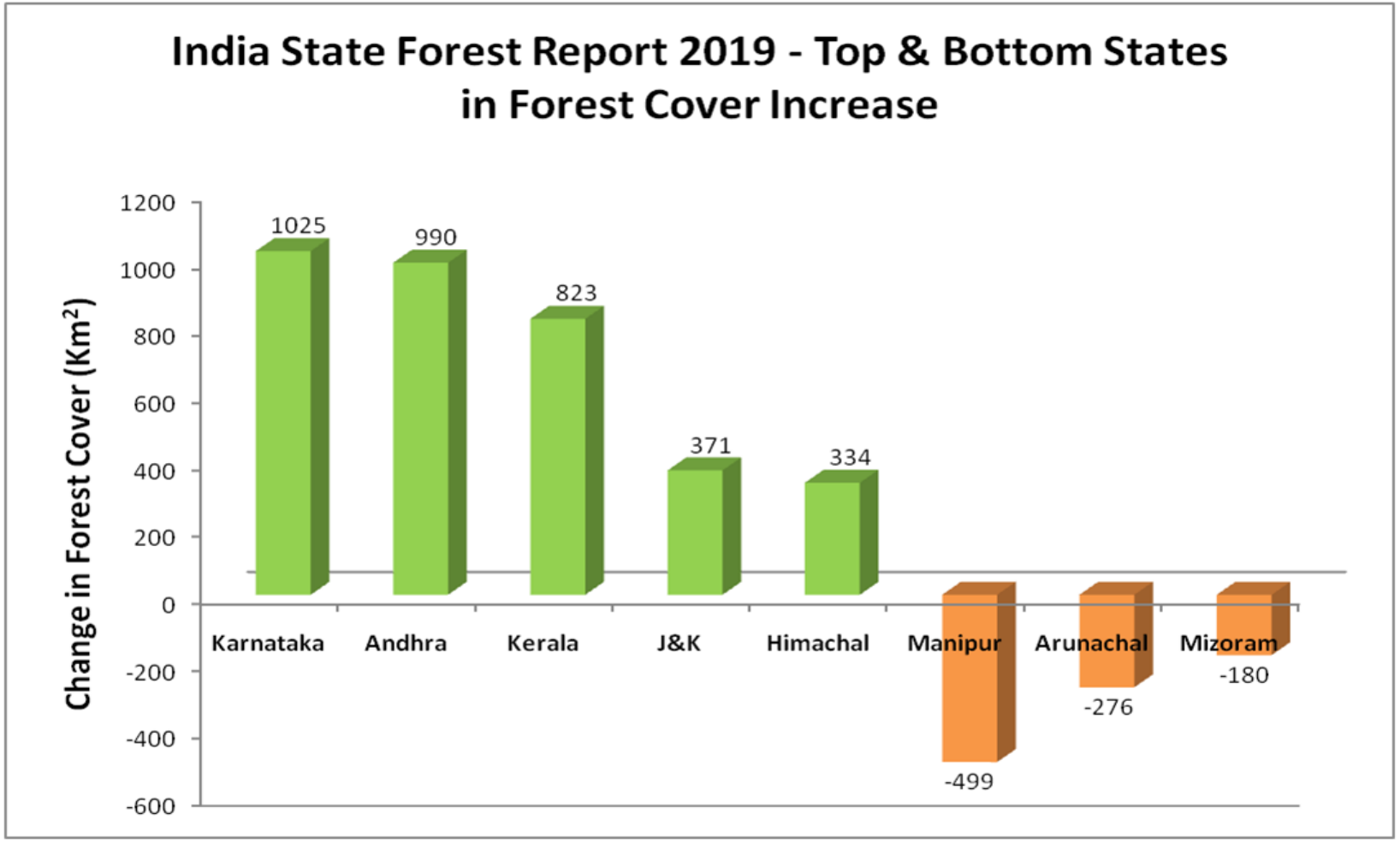
Deforestation in Potential Primary Forest States as example (in bio-hotspots)



Forests Cover Change

Selected States (Himalayas)	1987 Report (1981-1983) Area in km2	2019 Report Area in km2
Arunachal Pradesh	60500	67353 (+)
Nagaland	14351	13464 (-)
Meghalaya	16511	17321 (+)
Manipur	17659	17280 (-)
Himachal Pradesh	12882	14688 (+)
J&K	20880	22686 (+)

- In 1981-83: 4.35 Million ha affected by Shifting Cultivation
- 4.4 Million ha diverted to Non-Forest Use from 1951 to 1980
- Deforestation i.e. NE India lost 765 km^2 and Tribal areas 741 km^2 .

Conclusions

- Primary forests are consistently under direct human impact (Local Use, Livestock, Markets, Development paradigms, Transboundary Issues)
- Methodology and Data/Information Issues to Assess Primary Forest Cover/Status
- Traditional Forest Use, Current Forest Management and Development Paradigms suggest that Primary Forest Cover of mountains in India has drastically reduced
- Secondary and plantation forestry is the key contributor to the increase of forest cover since 1970s apart from approx. 7% terrestrial protected areas
- Field evidence suggests that in Western Himalayas Primary forests are relegated to steepest and remotest mountain areas and in North Eastern India and Tribal areas have still substantial forest cover as primary forest
- Given the current socio-economic development trends apart from encroachments, forest land diversion and ongoing degradation (climatic/non-climatic) primary forest cover is destined to reduce further
- Research on primary forests and their dynamics is fragmented and very limited

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Selective Recommendations for Way Forward

- ✓ Forest resource assessment methodology must be customised for identification and documentation of primary forests and their original characteristics.
- ✓ Since primary forest cover cannot be limited to protected forest areas, proactive forest management must be used to trigger natural regeneration processes to recover ecological status of such degraded forests (Here we must use the argument of climate change. resilience of natural forests than that of monocultures or secondary manmade forests).
- ✓ Use traditional practices knowledge to maintain the bio-physical characteristics as well as near to natural dynamics of such forests.
- ✓ Find alternatives and restore near to primary forest characteristics of forests affected by shifting cultivation or any other type of degradation.
- ✓ Create regional cooperation mechanisms as well as joint research networks aimed to understand the ecological dynamics of primary forests and create practical evidence for managing such forest on sustainable basis.