

## **New Study Reveals Alarming Declines In Guwahati's Forest Cover, Raises Climate-Related Concerns**

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As the northeast region struggles with erratic climate shifts owing to urbanisation and increasing pollution, Guwahati city has witnessed a decline in its forest area over the past four decades, as revealed by a study using satellite imagery. Chandra Kant Pawe of the geography department at Pragjyotish College and Anup Saikia of the geography department at Gauhati University studied urban forest dynamics between 1976 and 2018. They found that the region's dense and moderately dense forests shrank by 44 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively, while non-forested areas expanded by 1,475 hectares over that time. Urbanisation In Forests With No Protective Legislation There are 12 hills in Guwahati, 8 of which are protected and declared reserve forests, and the other four are not protected. A diverse range of wildlife can be found in these protected forest areas, containing 332 species of terrestrial vertebrates, including 214 bird species, 57 reptile species, 36 mammal species, and 25 amphibian species. The study revealed that the dense forest patches are limited to only three - Hengrabari, Jalukbari, and Amchang reserve forests. The dense forest patches comprise the eight reserved forests within Guwahati Metropolitan Area (GMA), while the non-protected hills reported a significant 13.9 per cent increase in non-forest land use.

Urbanisation continues to develop and expand into the dense forests and moderately dense forest regions of the hills with little to no enforcement of any protective legislation to keep an eye on these eco-sensitive places. Even though the state legislature introduced certain legal restrictions on the declining forest cover with the Assam Hill Land and Ecological Sites (Protection and Management) Act in 2006, the pressure transferred to the open forest and scrub, which between 2002 and 2018 decreased by 12 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively.

Depleting Forest Cover In The North-East According to the India State of Forests Report (ISFR) 2021, published by the Ministry of the Environment, the forest cover in the northeastern states decreased by 1,020 square kilometres between 2019 and 2021. In the past 20 years, Assam alone has lost almost 287 thousand hectares of its tree cover, according to Times Of India. According to the 2018 Climate Vulnerability Assessment, Assam and Mizoram have been named as the two northeastern states most vulnerable to climate change. So the depleting forest cover in the region makes it more critical for the government to initiate some immediate disaster planning in response. By 2028, the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing estimates that the forest cover in parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh will have decreased by 2.94 per cent. However, there are several issues to combat. In addition to the gradual loss of forest cover, experts believe that urbanisation, rising pollution in northeastern urban areas, shrinking water bodies, and other issues, together with global climate change, are detrimental to the region's growth.

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