

## Olympic Forest Network expands as India launches eco-restoration project

10 Oct 2023

Launched by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in September 2022, the Olympic Forest Network is adding an ambitious ecological restoration project in India's eastern state of Odisha – an area with one of the largest populations of tribal communities and home to a wealth of biodiversity and endangered species.

Led by the Odisha Forest Department, the Abhinav Bindra Foundation Trust and The Habitats Trust, and driven by IOC Athletes' Commission member and Olympic champion Abhinav Bindra, the Odisha Ridley Forest initiative aims to plant one million trees over an area covering 1,500 hectares.

Inspired by the IOC's Olympic Forest project, the Olympic Forest Network is part of the Olympic Movement's wider response to the global climate crisis. It aims to protect and restore existing forests, wildlife corridors and coastal watersheds, and to encourage regenerative agriculture. This latest addition means that the Olympic Forest Network now totals six initiatives, the others being in Brazil, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

"We are delighted that the Olympic Forest Network has inspired National Olympic Committees around the world to create impactful projects to protect and restore nature," said IOC President Thomas Bach.

"India's ambitious Odisha Ridley Forest initiative demonstrates the wide-ranging social benefits that this can bring to local communities. Sport depends on a healthy environment and a stable climate, and it must be part of the solution to safeguard them. It gives it a special meaning that this project has been initiated by an Olympic champion who is also a member of the IOC Athletes' Commission. I would like to congratulate Abhinav Bindra on his initiative to make this impressive project part of the Olympic Forest Network. I would also like to thank the state of Odisha for their great leadership."

Supported by the Indian Olympic Association, the Odisha Ridley Forest initiative will support the ecological restoration of a variety of forest types, including grasslands and wetlands, and protect local plant and animal species. Community-based forest management is central to the project, which is aimed at improving the lives of the local tribes, many of whom rely heavily on forest resources for their livelihoods.

The project is located in the eastern state of Odisha, home to a diverse range of tribal groups, many of whom have a deep cultural and historical connection to the region's forests. Some 37 per cent of the state's population depend on non-timber forest products for food and medicine, and almost half the rural community rely on selling forest produce for their income.

"Sport and the environment share core values of discipline, respect, and perseverance," said Abhinav Bindra, Olympic gold medallist, member of the IOC Athletes' Commission and founder of the Abhinav Bindra Foundation Trust. "My Olympic journey and the 'Odisha Ridley Forest' project both reflect these principles. The Abhinav Bindra Foundation Trust is proud to support this effort, blending the spirit of sportsmanship with ecological commitment. Together, we aim for a future where nature and sport unite for our planet's betterment."

"As we embark on the Odisha Ridley Forest project, we not only commit ourselves to ecological restoration but also set the stage for a brighter future," said the Honourable Chief Minister of Odisha, Shri Naveen Patnaik. "Odisha envisions a world where sport inspires our youth, and our youth, in turn, become the champions of a sustainable tomorrow. This initiative reflects our unwavering dedication to preserving our environment and nurturing the values of sportsmanship. Together, we shall lead the way in creating a harmonious blend of nature and human endeavour, leaving a lasting legacy for generations to come."

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Planting Forests, Restoring nature

Key project benefits include:

##### Biodiversity conservation

Planting indigenous and endangered species of trees and crops will help these species survive and contribute to the ecological balance of the region.

##### Soil restoration

The root systems of the newly planted trees can help improve soil quality and prevent erosion. In turn, this can reduce the risk of flooding.

##### Livelihood support

Community-based forest management helps to generate alternative income sources and provide new opportunities for local people. The project also uses local nurseries to supply the trees planted and support sustainable fishing practices in the region.

##### Carbon sequestration

Forests play a key role in the carbon cycle, absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. In Odisha, the project will allow for the sequestration of up to 19,000 tonnes of carbon over 10 years.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Global green shoots of the Olympic Forest Network

Since the Network's inception just over a year ago, five other projects have been included. Beyond tree planting, the Olympic Forest Network projects can include protection or restoration of existing forests, wildlife corridors, and coastal watersheds and ecosystems, together with regenerative agriculture.

Healthy forests, wetlands and other ecosystems not only capture carbon from the atmosphere. They also safeguard nature and help communities become more resilient and adapt to the effects of climate change, such as droughts, heatwaves, floods and landslides.

##### Brazil

The NOC will restore 10 hectares of degraded forest within the Tefé National Forest, located in the heart of the Amazon. The Tefé National Forest had been significantly deforested but was designated as a Protected Area some 20 years ago. It is an area which allows natural resources to be used by local traditional/ancient populations in accordance with sustainable management techniques. Working with a local community to plant native trees, the project aims to absorb about 1,400 tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year.

##### Papua New Guinea

The NOC has partnered with local communities, the National Fisheries Authority and the Conservation and Environment Protection Authority to restore a 3km strip of endangered mangroves and support a vital ecosystem. The project will be extended in the coming years and is connected to the Love Your Coast programme, which involves athletes in advocacy and education.

##### Portugal

The NOC will contribute to the Natura 2000 network of legally protected areas. In March 2023, 811 trees were planted in partnership with Worldwide Olympic Partner Procter & Gamble (P&G), and with the technical support of the Plantar uma Árvore association. In the same month, a further 10,000 trees were planted in partnership with Worldwide Olympic Partner Toyota, with the technical support of the governmental institute ICNF (Institute for Nature and Forest Conservation) and the Abramud e Sentido Verde association. Looking ahead, the objective is to conduct reforestation actions between October and February each year, through to and including 2028.

##### Slovenia

The NOC has organised the planting of 16,000 trees by athletes and local communities, restoring woodland areas in four locations across the country.

##### Spain

The NOC is planting 5,000 trees at five locations across the country. Reforested areas incorporate educational and sports-related elements, such as bicycle tracks, exercise circuits and onsite educational programmes. Planting started in March 2023.

The Olympic Forest Network requires that NOCs submit formal annual reports about their projects. Under the principles set up by the IOC Executive Board, the projects are required to:

- Contribute to enhancing climate and nature protection and resilience;
- Support and be delivered in partnership with local communities;
- Be developed and implemented in collaboration with the relevant experts and authorities; and
- Have a long-term maintenance plan in place.

The launch of the Olympic Forest Network was inspired by the IOC's Olympic Forest project, which involves planting around 600,000 trees across 90 villages in Mali and Senegal, creating social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities.

Source: <https://www.thenewsmarket.com/news/olympic-forest-network-expands-as-india-launches-eco-restoration-project/s/6d4b605f-f4e5-45ed-833e-cc56f2997d81>