

## Haryana diverted highest share of forest cover in North India

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Gurgaon: Even though Haryana has the lowest forest cover in the country, the state has diverted the highest percentage of forest land for non-forestry purposes over the last four years in north India.

According to the Forest Survey of India report, 2019, the state has diverted 15.29 sqkm of forest land, or nearly 1% of its total forest cover, for non-forestry purpose. "In Haryana, during the period January 1, 2015 to February 5, 2019, a total of 1,529 hectares (15.29 sqkm) of forest land was diverted for non-forestry purposes under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980," states the report that was released on Monday.

In the same period of time, Delhi didn't divert any forest land for non-forestry purpose. Rajasthan and Punjab, on the other hand, diverted 28.34 sqkm and 15.25 sqkm of forest for non-forest activities, respectively. Other neighbouring states, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, diverted just 9.6 sqkm and 1.6 sqkm, respectively.

While forest officials blame road-widening projects and infrastructural development in the state for the diversion, activists alleged the authorities had not compensated the forest area as per norms. "Haryana is one of the states that have witnessed a rapid infrastructural development. Unlike other states, Haryana notified green belts along roads as reserved forests. So, the state has mostly lost forests along the roads for road widening, and construction of highways, flyovers, etc," said a senior forest official.

"It is short-sightedness of the state government that it only considers infrastructural development as 'development'. What about quality of life which suffers due to concretisation? If the state government has diverted green belts along the roads for non-forestry purposes, it could have converted other areas into forests. The figures given in FSI report clearly mention that the state government has failed miserably to compensate the loss of forest area," said Vivek Kamboj from Haryali (an NGO that works on environment).

Forest analyst Chetan Agarwal said that the state should focus on providing legal protection to the Aravalis, and this will automatically increase the forest cover while also saving the eco-fragile mountain range from destruction.

Giving the example of Punjab, Kamboj said, "We can't simply say that development will cost us forests. We need to learn from other states like Punjab that has been able to increase its forest cover (marginally though). It is because Punjab has focussed on farm forestry in a big way since it is an agricultural state like Haryana. Farm forestry will not only help in reducing carbon footprints but it can also be used by farmers."

In Gurgaon, 10,329 trees were felled in 2018-19, and over 10,357 trees were cut in 2019-20 (till December 23).

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/haryana-diverted-highest-share-of-forest-cover-in-north-india/articleshowprint/73052420.cms>