

The KASHMIR MONITOR

J&K records 4th highest increase in forest cover

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Jammu, Jan 11: On December 30th, 2019, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar released the biennial "India State of Forest Report (ISFR)", in New Delhi and announced that the forest cover in the country has increased by 3,976 square Kilometres (sq km). As per the report, the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir too contributed in increasing the green cover by figuring among top five States/UTs recording highest increase.

The report by Forest Survey of India (FSI) comes after every two years and the 2019 report is 16th such report by the organization whose primary job is to conduct survey and assessment of forest resources across different states.

Remote sensing based forest cover assessment in a periodic manner helps in knowing a broad trend of forest cover in the country. The forest cover broadly signifies the expanse of forest resources.

As per the present assessment, the total forest and tree cover of the country is 80.73 million hectare which is 24.56 percent of the geographical area of the country and as compared to the assessment of 2017, there is an increase of 5,188 sq. km in the total forest and tree cover of the country. The total carbon stock of the country was estimated at 7,124 million tons, which is an increase of 42.6 million tons from the last assessment. With the focused attention and the hard efforts of the Department of Forests, Environment and Ecology, the Forest cover in Jammu and Kashmir has also increased and as per the ISFR-2019, the area under very dense forest category has also grown this time, the report revealed.

Jammu and Kashmir managed to be among the top five States/UTs that have registered maximum increase in forest cover during the last two years. The State/UTs showing significant gain in forest cover are Karnataka (1,025 sq km), Andhra Pradesh (990 sq km), Kerala (823 sq km) and J&K (371 sq km including 348 sq km in UT of J&K and 23 sq km in Ladakh UT).

The report further said that the forests of J&K have recorded the highest growing stock of wood per unit area, which is 144.16 cubic meter per hectare. The total carbon stock of forests in UTs including 'Trees outside Forests' is 390.20 million tonnes (1430.73 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent), which is 5.48 percent of the total forest carbon of the country.

ISFR-2019 revealed that the extent of forest cover and the trees outside the forests in UT of Jammu and Kashmir is 29,066 sq km, which is 55 percent of the total geographical area of UT of J&K.

A total of 42 forest types are found in the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, which are highest in the country and denotes the diversity of forest ecosystems in J&K.

The two UTs have so far notified 15,912 sq km under the Protection Area Network (PAN) which is 15.59% of the total geographical area of the combined UT, comprising five National Parks, 14 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 35 Conservation & Wetland Reserves. The FSI report said that the Protected Area (PA) network of the two UTs is the highest in the country in terms of area, which is nearly 10 percent of the country's PA network. Jammu and Kashmir has recorded the highest diversity of herbs in the country. The last study had shown that in J&K the area under very dense forest cover had grown by 14 sq km only which now has grown by 206 sq km which shows that area under very dense forest cover has increased the maximum.

In tune with the Government of India's vision of Digital India, FSI's assessment is largely based on digital data whether it is satellite data, vector boundaries of districts or data processing of field measurements. In this report, Ortho-rectified LISS III satellite data has been used for forest cover mapping due to its better positional accuracy as it removes effects of image perspective (tilt) and relief (terrain) and scale distortions in the image to represent features in its true positions for accurate measurement of distances, angles and areas.

The forest cover assessment reflects, in general, the status of forests in the country and its trend and provides inputs for broad evaluation of the forests related policies, legislations, programs and activities in the country.

The department of Forests is making continuous efforts to enhance quality of forest cover and improve ecosystem services from forest lands, including moderately dense forest cover, open forest cover and degraded grass lands.

The increase in the forest cover recorded by the FSI Report is the outcome of consistent reforestation efforts including mega plantation drives by the department and effective implementation of Forest related schemes. The afforestation activities are being promoted at every level by utilization of CAMPA funds and with improved techniques in challenging environment.

The way Forest Department is moving ahead, hopefully the ISFR Report that is to be prepared in 2021 would see further increase in forest cover in the Union Territory of J&K.

Source: <https://www.thekashmirmonitor.net/isfr-2019jk-records-4th-highest-increase-in-forest-cover/>