

Not forest, but tree cover census: Experts on FSI survey

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Chennai:

This reiterates what scientific journals by independent scientists published in the past two decades have pointed out. For TN, the tree cover has dipped by less than 0.5 per cent and this could be due to the impact of cyclone Gaja that ravaged Kodaikanal hills.

“The scientific temperament of the study is now under scanner and differences of opinions have already started brewing between the IFS fraternities across the country,” said a senior IFS officer, requesting anonymity. However, the matter has gained traction on social media and several Twitter handles are questioning the rationale behind the latest findings. “Across the country, elephants, leopards and tigers are straying outside the forest and Western Ghats is no exemption. But the forest survey points out that the tree and forest cover has increased and improved in southern states,” the official said.

The FSI study states that the tree cover outside forest area and inside the forest area has increased in the country over the past two decades, but this not reflected in the overall forest geographic area, pointed out conservation scientist A Kumaraguru, biodiversity conservation Foundation. “The tree cover has risen from 90,844 square km in the 2011 assessment to 95,748 square kilometres as per the current assessment in the last ten years. Thus, showing a detailed increase of 4,900 square km. In my view, this report should be taken as a tree cover census of India and not as the forest cover of India,” Kumaraguru said.

“In Valparai, nearly 2,000 kilometre is counted as a forest. In a landscape where priceless wet evergreen forests were destroyed some 150 years ago to plant tea and coffee, it is ironical that India is now calling tea estates as forest,” tweeted M D Madusudan. To the north of Valparai an intensive agricultural landscape around Pollachi town dominated by coconut is almost entirely counted as a forest. A large fraction of these coconut areas are classified as moderately dense forests, the naturalist tweeted.

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