



## **Receding forest cover cost Karnataka Rs 3,800 crore in 6 years**

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BENGALURU: Karnataka has suffered economic losses of Rs 3,800 crore due to depleting forest cover in the past six years, and these have been caused mainly by forest land conversion for non-forest purposes followed by forest fires and other natural calamities, according to a report by the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC).

The report, commissioned by the forest department and prepared by ISEC's Centre for Ecological Economics and Natural Resources, was submitted to Sanjai Mohan, principal chief conservator of forests, on Monday.

The report analysed losses from nine categories from 2015-16 to 2020-21. Loss of soil organic carbon has caused the highest loss (Rs 1,397 crore) followed by loss of timber (Rs 988 crore) and loss of carbon sequestration in vegetation (Rs 791 crore).

Surya Deo Pathak, additional principal chief conservator of forests, told TOI: "For the first time, there has been an assessment of economic loss suffered. The goal of commissioning such a report to an independent agency was to provide the government with relevant data for future planning. We're hopeful this would pave the way for a full-fledged eco-budget in the coming year."

ISEC assistant professor M Balasubramanian, who is the principal investigator, said the estimated final loss is at least Rs 1,000 crore more than the figure mentioned in the preliminary report submitted to the government in February.

Based on ISEC's preliminary report, chief minister Basavaraj Bommai had said in his budget that an "eco-budget" of Rs 100 crore will be allocated to compensate for the negative effect created on the forest eco-system due to natural and human interventions over the past five years.

Balasubramanian said the report has analysed only nine forest ecosystem services of the 22 recognised globally. "If the others are also studied, the loss could be at least Rs 10,000 crore," he said. The report has analysed the economic losses from carbon sequestration, organic soil carbon, soil erosion prevention, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen di-oxide, pollination services, non-timber forest produce, household income loss and loss of timber.

Pollination services, according to the author, are an important resource for improving crop yield and pollinators for many birds and insects.

"Loss of pollination services impacts agriculture production and the food security of the local economy," the report says, adding the report will help fill the policy vacuum on conservation of forest ecosystem services in Karnataka.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/receding-forest-cover-cost-karnataka-3-8k-cr-in-6-yrs/articleshow/90528316.cms>