

## The increasing forest cover in Andhra Pradesh

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**Amaravati:** In what could be described as good omen for the environment in the State, Andhra Pradesh showed 3.52 per cent positive change in the forest cover as per the latest survey released by the Union Government in the name of India State of Forest Report, 2019 (ISFR-2019) when compared with the same report in 2017.

This ISFR report is released once in two years. Andhra Pradesh stood in the second out of all the states and Union Territories in showing positive trend in green cover, after the Kerala, which is ahead of our state with 4.05 percent positive change in green cover.

Andhra Pradesh has 29,137 sq km of total forest cover, which is just 17.88 percent out of its total geographical area (GA) of 1,62,968 sq km. In addition to that, the scrubs spread across an extent of 8,255 sq km.

In terms of forest canopy density classes, the state has 1,994 sq km under Very Dense Forest (VDF), 13,938 sq km under Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) and 13,204 sq km under Open Forest (OF). The forest cover in the state has increased by 990 sq km as compared to the previous assessment reported in ISFR-2017, informed Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) N Prateep Kumar.

The forest cover inside and outside recorded forest area or Green Wash is like this. The extent of recorded forest area (RFA) is 37,258 sq km which is 22.86 percent of its total geographical area. The reserved, protected and unclassed forests are 85.78 percent and 13.60 percent and 0.62 percent of the recorded forest area in the state respectively.

In fact, there should be at least 33 percent forest cover for any State. To reach this target, the Forest department has prepared a detailed strategy, Prateep Kumar explained.

A look at the district-wise forest cover in the state reveals that the East Godavari has shown the highest positive change in the state, followed by West Godavari, Vizianagaram and Krishna districts. In fact, these four districts contributed to the overall increase in the forest cover of the state, in the last couple of years. The change in the forest cover with respect to previous assessment year is 268 sq km in East Godavari, 246 sq km in West Godavari, 190 sq km in Vizianagaram and 167 sq km in Krishna. On the other hand, Kadapa, Kurnool, Chittoor and Anantapur districts of Rayalaseema fell in negative change. That means, the forest cover in these four districts decreased instead of increase or sustaining. The highest decrease in the forest cover is recorded in the districts of Kadapa with -16.34 sq km, -1.43 sq km in Kurnool, -0.57 in Chittoor and -0.17 in Anantapur.

The Forest department assessed the biodiversity region in the State which reveals that there are 242 types of plant species, 64 types of shrub species and 58 types of herb species spread across various kinds of forest areas in the state.

The department also categorised the classes of Forest Fire Prone areas. The survey has categorised at least 1,148 sq km of the forest area, which is 4.26 percent of total forest cover under extremely fire prone, 3,785 sq km which comes to 13 percent under very highly fire prone, 5,017 sq km which is 15 percent under highly fire prone, 7,172 sq km, 19 percent under moderately fire prone and the rest is under less fire prone area, out of the total forest area in the state.

The department also notified the carbon stock in forest. The total carbon stock of the forests in State including Trees Outside Forest (TOF) patches which are more than 1 hectare in size is 220 million tonnes (805 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent), which is 3.08 percent of total forest carbon of the country.

Interestingly, the dependence of people on forest in AP is also observed. The Forest Survey of India has estimated that the people dependent on the forest produce in the state for various reasons including 27,89,052 tonnes of fuel wood, 2,50,42,838 tonnes of fodder, 14,739 tonnes of bamboo and 81,808 tonnes of small timber.

Prateep Kumar explained that when apprised the status of the forest cover in the State with CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, he has assured men and money support to reach the target of 33 percent forest cover. The department brought a comprehensive treatment plan with an estimated cost of around Rs 6,000 crore.

He said that the Forest department officials have been striving very hard in terms of protecting the existing forest areas, increasing the forest cover, despite of a huge shortage of employees.

Source: <https://www.thehansindia.com/andhra-pradesh/the-increasing-forest-cover-in-andhra-pradesh-597521>