

2.12. Forestry & Wildlife, Plantations

Introduction

The forest is a complex ecosystem consisting mainly of trees that buffer the earth and support a myriad of life forms. The trees help create a special environment which, in turn, affects the kinds of animals and Plants that can exist in the forest. Trees are an important component of the environment. They clean the air, cool it on hot days, conserve heat at night, and act as excellent sound absorbers. People began life on this Planet as forest dwellers. They were food gatherers and depended on the forest for all their needs: food, clothing, and shelter. They gradually became food growers, clearing a small patch in the forest to grow food. But they continued to depend on forests to meet many of their needs. Even today people depend on the forest for paper, timber, fuel wood, medicine, and fodder.

Tamil Nadu State is spread over a geographical area of 1,30,058 sq.kms. It has a recorded forest area 22,877 sq. kms. accounting for 17.59% of its total geographical area. The Forest cover in the State is 22643 sq. kms. i.e., 17.41% and tree cover in the State is 4991 sq. kms. i.e. 3.84%. Total Forest cover and Tree cover in the State is 27634 sq. kms. which is 21.25% of the geographical area of Tamil Nadu. This proportion is very much below the National Forest Policy stipulation of 25% by 2007 and of 33.33% by 2012. The recorded forest comprises of 19285 Sq. Kms. of reserve forests, 2254 Sq. Kms. of reserve lands and 1306 Sq. Kms. of unclassified forests. In terms of per capita measure of forestland, the figure for Tamil Nadu is 0.04 hectare as against the national average of 0.08 hectare. These basic indicators of forest estimates clearly highlight the scarcity of forest resources in the State.

The basic thrust of the Tamil Nadu State Forest Policy is towards attaining ecological stabilization, protection of forests, wildlife conservation, conserving the genetic resources and eco-systems and maintenance of all natural forests, enhancing forest productivity and

enrichment of the forests' water resources, and achieving the objective of increasing the forest and tree cover in the State.

The state has nearly 16 % of the forest area declared as Protected Areas. The State is also a part of the Global Mega Biodiversity hotspots, namely the Western Ghats which are home to several endemic floral and faunal species. As on date, there are 8 sanctuaries, five National parks, 12 Bird Sanctuaries, two Biosphere Reserves, one Conservation Reserve and three project Tiger areas and one gene pool garden in Tamil Nadu. The State is also endowed with the unique coastal line hosting rich mangroves and associated forest types. Eastern Ghats also contribute to the richness of biodiversity of the State. The State also has very rich medicinal plants biodiversity spread across all forest types. The forests of Tamil Nadu are governed by the Tamil Nadu State Forest Act, 1882, Wild Life Protection Act, 1972 and a host of Rules formulated under the rule enabling powers of the Act. The forest legislation contains provision for the implementation of the forest policy.

Performance during 2007-08

An amount of Rs.185.70 crore is expected to be incurred during 2007-08 to implement various forestry schemes. The physical target and achievement for the Annual plan 2007-08 for the major indicators is given below:

Physical Targets and Achievements during 2007-08				
S. No.	Item	Unit	Target for 2007-08	Anticipated Achievement for 2007-08
1.	Tree planting under TAP in degraded forest areas	Ha.	51500	51500
2.	Tree planting under Special Area Programme			
	(a) HADP	Ha.	250	250
	(b) WGDP	Ha.	600	600
3.	Plantation under Wasteland Development Programme	Ha.	1500	1500
4.	Minor Forest Produce Plantation	Ha.	110	110
5.	Teak Plantation	Ha.	3160	3160

Objectives, Targets and Strategies for 2008-09

The National Forestry Policy, 1988 has envisaged that the forest/ tree cover in the country to be brought to 25% by 2007 and to 33% by 2012. The present forest / cover in Tamil Nadu is 21%. Though there are many sites in Tamil Nadu, where, potential natural regeneration and restoration is possible, much of it is under agriculture or taken over by urbanisation and industrialisation including settlements in the past few years. To bring such areas under forests and to increase the forest and tree cover remains a big challenge. There is need for bringing all available lands like government, institutional, farmlands, private lands to a large extent under tree cover fold by tree farming. The objectives are:

- To enhance tree cover outside forests for livelihood security.
- To ensure environmental and ecological stability of the State.
- Conservation of biodiversity, wildlife and genetic resource.
- Conservation and management of coastal eco system.
- Resource management and augmentation of forest protection.
- Water augmentation through forest conservation and catchment area management.
- To ensure ecological stability and economic prosperity through tribal development.
- Technology support, research, remote sensing, GIS and extensions for scientific forest management.
- To empower women for sustainable forest management.
- Human resource management for scientific forestry management.
- To monitor efficiently the delivery mechanism through Infrastructure development.

Strategy

The Eleventh Five Year Plan may have to take a new path with emphasis on resource mobilization for tree cultivation outside the forest area. The thrust area of trees outside forests today has emerged as new opportunity not only to support increased tree cover but also to improve farm income for the small and marginal farmers in the State.

This plan will for the first time seek to engage the rural landless poor and the marginal farmers into tree cultivation and also support the dynamic growth of the primary sector in the state while also ensuring that the forests are protected and conserved for harnessing the expected forest based goods and services for the benefit of the people in the State. The following are the major thrust areas, which includes the important schemes of the department to be implemented during the plan period.

Schemes

Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project (TAP): Phase-II (2005-06 to 2012-13)

Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project Phase-II is being implemented with an outlay of Rs.567.42 crore with a soft loan of (Rs. 409.08 crore) from Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and balance Rs 158.34 crore from State Government funds. The main strategy is to treat the degraded forest areas in forest fringe villages through Joint Forest Management on integrated watershed basis. Improving the quality of life of tribals is given more emphasis. The outlay for the year 2008-09 is Rs. 117.16 crore to cover an extent of 51500 ha. of degraded forests and 230 forest fringe villages including 40 tribal villages.

Increasing Tree Cover outside the Forest Areas of Tamil Nadu

The project envisages bringing about 7 lakh ha. Under tree cover during the Eleventh Plan period and increase the tree cover considerably outside the traditional forest area.

During 2008-09, it is proposed to implement the scheme on Increasing Forest / Tree Cover Inside Forest under HADP and WGDP at a cost of Rs.7.25 crore, covering an extent of 425 ha.

Tribal Development

The Forest Department has implemented various programmes for the development and employment generation of tribals within the forests like provide better education to the tribal children through nineteen schools, providing solar lights, improving and laying new roads to the tribal settlements, provide safe drinking water etc. Under Tamil Nadu Afforestation Schemes various facilities have provided to the tribals for improving their income generation. Tribals in the forest area have been allowed for free collection of Non-timber forest produce (NTFP).

The outlay for the year 2007-08 was Rs. 1.01 crore, which has been increased to Rs. 1.79 crore during 2008-09.

Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Trust

Gulf of Mannar is the first Marine Biosphere Reserve not only in India, but also in South and South East Asia. The Gulf of Mannar and its 3,600 species of flora and fauna is one of the biologically richest coastal regions in all of mainland of India. The Biosphere Reserve comprises 21 islands with estuaries, mudflats, beaches, forests of the near shore environment, including marine components like algal communities, sea grasses, coral reefs, salt marshes and mangroves. As a new initiative, a Trust has been set up to enhance protection through infrastructure development, capacity building of all stakeholders through training, to create awareness, to undertake research and monitoring works on themes of resource inventories and to ensure participation of local communities and securing alternative livelihoods for them. The works carried out by the Gulf of Mannar Trust include, expanding the park infrastructure, preparation of a bio-diversity overlay for the reserve, and developing and demonstrating sustainable livelihood options for the inhabitants

of the area. The works carried out under this Trust extend from the period 2002 to 2011.

Outlay for 2008-09

The Approved allocation for year 2008-09 for the sector 'Forestry & Wildlife, Plantations' is Rs.171.92 crore, of which Rs.3.82 crore will flow to TSP.