

Forest and Environment Department (formerly Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management Department) is mandated with control and management of forests, environment and wildlife; creation, control and management of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, gardens, forests works, construction and maintenance including check posts, forest rest houses, saw mills, machinery and equipments, enforcement and implementation of Acts and laws related to Forest, Wildlife and Environment and host of such other activities of the State. The State of Sikkim has the largest recorded forest land area covering 82.31% of its geographical area. Reserve Forest, Khasmal and Gorucharan are the three categories of forest in the State. Khasmal forest is forest land settled and set aside by the Government for meeting the bonafide domestic need of timber, firewood and fodder of the resident of adjoining villages. The ecosystem services provided by the forest are indispensable. People earn their livelihood from the forests. It provides food, water, shelter, air, non timber forest produce, minerals, building materials, carbon sequestration, heat control, environment pollution abatement what not.

Sikkim is bestowed with majestic mountains, beautiful hills and valleys, crystal clear water falls, springs and lakes, rivers and streams, steep and undulating terrains, snow clad mountains, low lying land ranging from altitude of 310 m (Jorethang) to 8586m (Mount Khangchendzonga) from MSL. Forest land is interspersed with varied forms of flora and fauna. State lies in the Eastern Himalayas which is a biodiversity hotspot. Forests in Sikkim harbor host of endemic flora, rare and endangered species of plants and animals, high value medicinal plants etc. Sikkim is a botanist's paradise. There are mainly five forest types in Sikkim namely Sub Tropical, Moist Mixed Deciduous, Wet Temperate, Conifer and Sub-Alpine forest.

Within an area of 7096 sq km, the state has 30.77% of forest as protected area comprising of seven wildlife sanctuaries and one national park which is highest in the country. Khangchendzonga National Park, the only National Park in the state is also the UNESCO World Heritage Site declared in July 2016. The forest cover of the State has increased by 4% approximately over the last 20 years. Rural water sources have got rejuvenated, wildlife populations have gone up, forest gaps have been filled and soil erosion has been checked larger extent. Water bodies have increased by 2 km² due to protection of forest with strict enforcement of relevant Forest Laws and Rules in the State. Many afforestation activities under different programmes and schemes to rejuvenate the degraded forest lands, implementation of Non – forest and Private Land Tree Felling Rules have been taken up.

The people of Sikkim are environmentally aware for conservation of its natural resources and sustainable use of forest resources that is why the tree cover outside forest (TOF) has also increased as per the State of Forest Report 2017 published by Forest Survey of India, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India. However, the forest cover of the State has gone down slightly as per 2017 ISFR, the main reason behind decline in forest cover is due to diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes like establishment of hydropower projects, construction of border roads for defense purpose, rural connectivity roads for economic up-liftment of rural masses. These activities are in the interest of nation and sovereignty of the country and cannot be ignored. In all such diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes, compensatory afforestation is mandatory and the fund for afforestation is levied and realized from the user agency (ies) for afforestation on

double the forest land diverted for non-forestry purpose to restore the blank and degraded forests and to compensate the loss of forest land used for developmental activities (non-forestry purposes).

Forest and Environment Department has been implementing various schemes and programmes both Centrally Sponsored Schemes/Central Sector Schemes and State Funded Schemes for protection and conservation of forests, restoration of biodiversity and environment amelioration. Department has also initiated climate change mitigation measures which is a big challenge of this hour