

India's forest, tree cover up by 1% in 2 years: Centre

India's tree and forest cover has registered an increase of 1% or 8,021 sq. km in two years since 2015, according to the latest assessment by the government.

The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017 was released by Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan and his Deputy Mahesh Sharma in New Delhi on Monday.

Mr. Harsh Vardhan said India has shown an increasing trend in the forest and tree cover as against the global trend of decreasing forest cover during the last decade.

According to the report, the total forest cover is 7,08,273 sq. km, which is 21.54% of the total geographical area of the country. Forest and tree cover combined is 8,02,088 sq. km or 24.39% of the total geographical area.

The Environment Ministry said in the latest assessment that very dense forest in India has also increased by 1.36% as compared to 2015. ISFR is released every two years.

"There is an increase of 8,021 sq. km [about 80.20 million hectare] in the total forest and tree cover of the country, compared to the previous assessment in 2015.

"The increase in the forest cover has been observed as 6,778 sq. km and that of tree cover as 1,243 sq. km," Mr. Harsh Vardhan said.

He said that the encouraging sign was that much of the increase in forest cover has been observed in very dense forest (VDF) category, as they absorb maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

"The increase in forest cover in VDF is followed by increase in open forest," the Minister said, adding that ISFR 2017 has

been prepared with the help of scientific tools.

He said Madhya Pradesh (77,414 sq. km) has the largest forest cover in the country in terms of area, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (66,964 sq. km) and Chhattisgarh (55,547 sq. km).

In terms of percentage of forest cover with respect to the total geographical area, Lakshadweep with (90.33%) has the highest forest cover, followed by Mizoram (86.27%) and Andaman and Nicobar Island (81.73%), he said.

“Work has already started for preparing ISFR 2019,” he said.

The top five States where maximum forest cover has increased are Andhra Pradesh (2,141 sq. km), Karnataka (1,101 sq. km), Kerala (1,043 sq. km), Odisha (885 sq. km) and Telangana (565 sq. km).

The survey, which has for the first time assessed water bodies, said that these bodies inside forest cover have increased by 2,647 sq. km during last decade.

It said Maharashtra (432 sq. km), Gujarat (428 sq. km), Madhya Pradesh (389 sq. km) are top three states showing increase in water bodies within forest areas.

“Overall, almost all the states have shown a positive change in water bodies,” it said.

The five States where forest cover has decreased most are Mizoram (531 sq. km), Nagaland (450 sq. km), Arunachal Pradesh (190 sq. km), Tripura (164 sq. km) and Meghalaya (116 sq. km).

Ministry officials said that these States are in the Northeast where the total forest cover is very high – more than 70% in each State.

The main reasons for the decrease are shifting cultivation, other biotic pressures, rotational felling, diversion of forest lands for developmental activities, submergence of

forest cover, agriculture expansion and natural disasters, they said.

The present assessment also reveals that 15 States and Union Territories (UTs) have above 33% of the geographical area under forest cover.

Out of these States and UTs, Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur have more than 75% forest cover, while eight – Tripura, Goa, Sikkim, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Assam have forest cover between 33% and 75%.

“18,000 points have been physically surveyed in a scientific manner in the preparation of the report,” Mahesh Sharma said.

“India is ranked 10th in the world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4% of the world’s surface area and sustains the needs of 17% of human and 18% livestock population,” Mr. Harsh Vardhan said.

The Minister said as per the latest Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, India is placed 8th in the list of top ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.

Source: xaam.in