



TAMIL NADU FOREST DEPARTMENT



MUKURTHI NATIONAL PARK

STATE FOREST POLICY 2018



CONTENTS

1.	PREAMBLE	1
2.	BASIC OBJECTIVES	2
3.	STRATEGY	3
3.1.	Conservation of Biodiversity, Wildlife and their genetic resources	3
3.2.	Rehabilitation and Restoration of Degraded forests	4
3.3.	Coastal Eco-system conservation and management	5
3.4.	Mitigating / adapting Climate Change through enhancing tree cover inside and outside forests	5
3.5.	Forestry Extension for tree cover augmentation, outreach and conservation education for wildlife management support	6
3.6.	Forest-based industries	8
3.7.	Water augmentation through forest conservation, integrated watershed management and wetland management	8
3.8.	Upliftment of the forest dependent women and ensuring a significant role for them in forest management	9
3.9.	Tribal Development	10
3.10.	Technology support - Research and Development for scientific forest management	10
3.11.	Eco-Tourism for supporting conservation	11
3.12.	Human Resource Development for forestry management	12
4.	INCREASE BUDGETARY (FINANCIAL) SUPPORT FOR FORESTRY SECTOR	13



STATE FOREST POLICY 2018

1. PREAMBLE

Forestry is a natural terrestrial land use with its critical impact on the life supporting systems of soil, water, air and biodiversity. Management of forest in Tamil Nadu is crucial for meeting the ecological security and economic well being of people of the State. Action to conserve, sustainably manage and restore forests would contribute to economic growth, poverty alleviation, food security, climate resilience and biodiversity conservation. Forests contribute substantially in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Tamil Nadu forests also contribute towards cultural and spiritual values in the State.

1.1. Tamil Nadu's specific geographical, climatic, edaphic, ecological, environmental and demographic characteristics are exemplified by

- long coastline;
- presence, confluence and influence of the Eastern and Western Ghats;
- dry climate and scarce water resources;
- need for significant enhancement of tree cover outside the forests.

These distinct characteristics of the State justify the need for a distinct State Forest Policy. This policy is also essential to achieve the objectives of the National Forest Policy and VISION Tamil Nadu 2023 documents. Hence the following State Forest policy is enunciated.

1.2. The National Forest Policy of 1988 principally aims at maintenance of ecological balance and environmental stability that is vital for the sustenance of all life forms and achieve this aim by bringing at least one third of the total land area and at least two third of the total hill area of the country under forest and tree cover.



1.3. In 2014, Government of Tamil Nadu had launched VISION TAMIL NADU 2023 with a strategic plan for infrastructure development. “Nurturing a rich heritage and preserving the ecology”, is one of the themes in this VISION which aims at increasing the forest cover, protection of wetlands and other water bodies, protection of coastal zones and fragile ecosystems and conservation of zoological and botanical diversity of the State among other things. Also, tree cover outside forests is the single most important and cost-effective strategy for achieving the goal of 33% forest and tree cover.

2. BASIC OBJECTIVES

2.1. Objectives of the State Forest Policy include preserving natural forests and wildlife, conservation of ecosystems and their genetic diversity, environmental stabilization, enhancement of forest productivity, augmentation of water resources from the forests, increasing tree cover and climate change mitigation.

Main thrust areas towards achieving the declared objectives of the Tamil Nadu Forest Policy are:

- I. Conservation of Biodiversity, Wildlife and their genetic resources
- II. Rehabilitation and restoration of Degraded forests
- III. Coastal Ecosystem conservation and management
- IV. Mitigating / adapting climate change through enhancement of tree cover inside and outside forests
- V. Water augmentation through forest conservation and integrated watershed management
- VI. Involving local people, especially the tribal communities in protection, conservation and wildlife management
- VII. Technology support, Research and Development for scientific forest management
- VIII. Ecotourism for providing livelihood to the local people, especially the tribal communities
- IX. Human Resource Development for Forest Management



3. STRATEGY

To achieve the above objectives, following strategies are to be followed:

3.1. Conservation of Biodiversity, Wildlife and their genetic resources

Conservation of dense forest areas covering approximately 13,462 sq.km., having crown density of more than 40%, shall be managed essentially for meeting the environmental and conservation needs of the State. The State has about 30.92% of the forest areas declared as Protected Areas. The State also owns a part of one of the Global Mega Biodiversity hotspots, namely the Western Ghats which is home to several endemic floral and faunal species. As on date, the State has 15 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 5 National Parks, 15 Bird Sanctuaries, 3 Biosphere Reserves, 2 Conservation Reserves and 4 Project Tiger areas and 1 genepool garden. The State is also endowed with a unique coastline hosting rich Mangroves and associated forest types. Eastern Ghats also contribute to the richness of biodiversity of the State.

In order to protect and conserve this wide array of floral and faunal diversity, Protected Areas will be strengthened and consolidated as envisaged in the National Wildlife Action Plan and guidelines issued by the Government of India from time to time. Increase in the Conservation area network through acquisition of corridors and extension of habitats, will establish protected area linkages with reserved forests and provide wider habitat areas for wildlife. Timely payment of compensation for loss of life, property / crop damage would also be implemented. This would also reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

3.1.1. Voluntary relocation of forest dwellers from Tiger Reserves would be encouraged through suitable relocation package to create inviolate habitats. Eco-Sensitive Zones around each protected area to safeguard habitats of wildlife and to ensure safe dispersal, shall be identified and notified.

3.1.2. Strict enforcement of Forest Laws shall be ensured for optimum forest protection thereby conserving ecosystems and genetic resources. Plantations of exotic species will be reconverted into natural forests. Special efforts shall be taken for protection, conservation and enrichment of important species endemic to a particular area. The menace of invasive alien species will be tackled in a scientific manner. Grazing in forest areas shall be regulated with the involvement of the local community.



3.1.3. Earnest efforts shall be made to elicit cooperation from the villagers to prevent the occurrence of forest fire. Action will be taken to enhance the capabilities of the department by using modern technological tools to detect and to extinguish forest fires.

3.1.4. Protection of the private forests from clandestine diversion for non-forest purposes shall be ensured for conserving natural forests and proven habitats of endangered species of flora and fauna in private lands irrespective of the status of holding.

3.1.5. Shifting cultivation will be discouraged by providing alternative avenues of income, suitably harmonized with the right land use practices.

3.1.6. Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 shall be strictly enforced to preserve the existing forest cover for ecological security. Requests for diversion of forest lands will be examined on a case-by-case approach and diversions be restricted. Commercial activities within the forests shall be discouraged.

3.1.7. For the success of in situ conservation, strong ex situ - in situ linkages are to be established. Major and minor Zoological Parks and the Genepool Garden will be involved in the task of establishing such linkages for success in conservation.

3.2. Rehabilitation and Restoration of Degraded forests

A large proportion of forests in State was subjected to severe degradation and destruction by the faulty management practices and the unrelenting massive anthropogenic pressures in the middle years of last century. But the most satisfying development is that the State have not only succeeded in arresting further degradation but reforested about 6,00,000 hectares of forest under Joint Forest Management in the last twenty years following an ecosystem approach called "Facilitating Natural regeneration supplemented with artificial regeneration under community participation" through Externally Aided Projects. Tamil Nadu will further move towards an ecosystem approach of forest management by applying principles of "Close to Nature Forestry". Under close to nature approach, the focus would not only be on trees but also on shrubs, climbers, herbs, grasses, fauna, micro fauna and flora, soil, soil nutrients, soil moisture and the fringe human habitations that affect the ecological processes and are at the centre of ecosystem management. Open forest land, having crown density of less than 40%, and forests, which are adjacent to the villages and having crown density of 40% to 60%, which are likely to become



degraded shall be managed by seeking the willing participation of the local people in reforestation and protection by sharing with them the sustainable benefits accrued from such forests. Involvement of the people in this venture through Joint Forest Management shall be encouraged by establishment of Village Forest Committees (VFCs) in each of the identified villages under afforestation programme.

3.3. Coastal Ecosystem Conservation and Management

3.3.1. Special attention shall be given for the management of the fragile ecosystem of coastal areas with a thrust on mangrove forests, wetlands and the Marine National Parks. Considering their vital role in the coastal ecosystem the degraded mangroves will be rejuvenated wherever feasible.

The State Forest Department shall also improve and develop mangroves in the State as bio-shield along the coast.

Coastal shelterbelt plantations shall be raised to reduce the velocity of winds to minimize wind erosion and to act as a protective shield for the coastal areas against the vagaries of nature including natural calamities like Tsunami, cyclones, tidal surges and floods.

3.3.2. The Gulf of Mannar Biosphere reserve shall support the conservation of marine biodiversity through integration of activities of relevant departments and through community participation and adoption of scientific management principles and programmes and shall continue to provide environmental benefits to the present as well as future generations.

3.3.3. There are many un-notified areas under Mangroves, located along the coast in the estuaries. Improvement of such areas has been already done by the Forest Department. Such areas shall be notified as forest and brought under the control of Forest Department.

3.4. Mitigating / Adapting Climate Change through enhancing tree cover inside and outside forests

3.4.1. The National Forest Policy, 1988 envisages that the area under forest and tree cover be enhanced to 33% of the geographical area of the Nation. The State will formulate innovative strategies for increasing the forest and tree cover from present level of 21.76% of the geographical area of the State to 33%. The State would strive to achieve 33% forest and tree cover by 2030.



3.4.2. India is a signatory to different international agreements for reducing the greenhouse emissions. There is growing concern about the climate change and also the confidence in resolving this through biomass build up which act as carbon sinks. Massive tree plantation activities through collaboration with private and public participation can result in greater carbon sequestration mitigate global warming, and promote bio-fuels production as an alternative to fossil fuels.

This can be accomplished only by undertaking massive afforestation over degraded forest areas and on areas outside the forests (such as community lands, waste lands, Panchayats lands, revenue lands and farm lands). Therefore this envisages massive effort on the part of the Government, Panchayats, Community, NGOs and others including farmers. This can be accomplished through multi-stakeholder partnerships and through public-private collaborative efforts (JFM etc.).

3.4.3. Tamil Nadu will design its tree-based programmes appropriately to encourage and support tree planting on private lands. The outdated rules and regulations will be revisited and certain obsolete restrictions and regulations which hamper tree growing by farmers be done away with. Tree growing in private lands will be reformed into a free enterprise for this effort to succeed and following specific measures will be taken.

- Forest department with the help of research institutions will develop better quality clones of indigenous species and provide necessary scientific information on tree farming to the farmers. Viable agroforestry models shall be continuously developed.
- Formation of tree farmers' cooperative societies will be facilitated to organize the farmers to take care of their interest and to avoid exploitation by middlemen.
- Massive awareness programmes through Panchayats, NGOs, educational institutions and media will be organized for mitigating/adapting to Climate Change within the State of Tamil Nadu.

3.5. Forestry Extension for tree cover augmentation, outreach and conservation education for wildlife management support

3.5.1. With the need for increasing tree cover outside forests, it is essential to build strong forestry extension services and to network the tree planting activities in the State. The district level



extension centres will be extended further to block levels so that the information on trees and tree based entrepreneurship and livelihood support mechanisms are understood and appreciated by the rural people. Extension centres will support the movement of tree growers' cooperative societies. Multiple key players will be roped in to provide both the scope and the reach among the rural communities to follow integrated watershed based approach, of which tree farming will be one of the key components.

The Forest department shall be equipped to provide technical support in this endeavor. Liberalization of the existing Acts and Rules imposing restrictions or impediments on tree growing, tree felling, transport, and tree marketing is required to make tree planting a people's movement. The State Government shall strive continuously to remove irritants and restrictions, if any, on tree planting by modifying, revising, or if need be, amending necessary provisions of Acts and Rules.

Felling regulations on private lands would be restricted to such endangered, scheduled and valuable tree species which are almost entirely found in forest areas like the sandalwood, red sanders etc. Transit rules and regulations may be restricted to only endangered and scheduled species and there may usually be no restriction on the felling and removal of other tree species on private holdings except in the areas covered by Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949 and by Tamil Nadu Hill Areas (Preservation of Trees) Act, 1955.

3.5.2. Urban Forestry

Planting suitable tree species as road avenues and tree parks will be promoted by the Forest department in association with the urban local bodies and NGOs to minimize the level of pollution and to ameliorate the urban environment. Apart from planting suitable tree species as road avenues, planting with perennial horticultural crops shall contribute to both the green cover and commercial utility. Also in cities, planting of suitable ornamental and foliage tree species shall combat pollution.

3.5.3. Wildlife Conservation Education Outreach

Wildlife awareness shall be enhanced through education and awareness programmes conducted in Protected Area networks (National Parks, Sanctuaries) and Zoological parks/gardens in the State. Linkages will be established with local schools and colleges, research institutions, conservation groups for dissemination of information to public on wildlife



conservation issues, to tide over human and wildlife conflicts and to achieve harmony with nature. Interpretation centres, outreach activities for schools and colleges and target user groups, training modules and publicity materials will be developed to bring forests closer to the people.

3.6. Forest-Based Industries

The main considerations governing the establishment of forest-based industries and supply of raw material to them shall be as follows:

- Natural forests serve as a genepool resource and help to maintain ecological balance. Such forests should not, therefore, be made available to industries for undertaking plantation or any other activities.
- There shall be no supply of forest produce to industry at concessional rates. Industry shall be encouraged to use alternative sources for raw materials, including imports from elsewhere in the country and abroad.
- Forest-based industries shall be encouraged to promote contract farming for tree cultivation in private lands with buy back facility and enter into tripartite agreement with tree farmers and bankers to augment tree resources in the State.
- Farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers, shall be encouraged to grow tree species required for the industries on their marginal and degraded lands. Such trees may also be grown along with fuel and fodder species on community lands by obtaining the consent of the local people.

3.7. Water augmentation through forest conservation, integrated watershed management and wetland management

3.7.1. The State has a network of rivers formed by many famous rivers and their tributaries. Flowing eastwards, all these rivers are completely rainfed and originate from the forests of Western Ghats. There are 17 river basins, a majority of which is water stressed. There are 61 major reservoirs; about 40,000 tanks and about 3 million wells that heavily utilize the available surface water (17.5 BCM) and groundwater (15.3 BCM). Given the geographical area of about 13 million ha. and the average annual rainfall of about 950 mm with bi-modal distribution, the surface water



potential is estimated at 25,000 MCM (893 TMC) and the ground water potential is about 22,400 MCM (800 TMC). The demand of water for non-agricultural purposes in year 2025 will be about 16,500 MCM (589 TMC) and the demand for agriculture purposes will be about 45,000 MCM (1607 TMC) thus leaving a supply-demand gap of about 14,100 MCM (504 TMC) (29.7 %). Hence, water harnessing potential of all forest catchments will be improved, safeguarded, monitored and streamlined through appropriate proven methods.

3.7.2. The multitude of forest catchments will be protected through massive soil and water conservation programmes and treatment measures. The present approach of integrated watershed management will be further strengthened by ensuring the active involvement of all stakeholders. Coordination with the other relevant departments will be increased for the development of the stake holders.

3.7.3. Wetlands and lakes in general and those in and around the urban areas are facing serious threat of siltation and encroachment. These wetlands and lakes perform multiple ecological functions. They are rich in biodiversity, recharge ground water and provide habitat for several flora and fauna. Suitable measures will be initiated to protect these water bodies so that they continue to provide environmental benefits to the present as well as future generations. In this context Wetland [Conservation and Management] Rules, 2017 will be implemented.

3.8. Upliftment of the forest dependent women and ensuring a significant role for them in forest management

As per present guidelines, women account for half of the members of the Village Forest Councils and one third of the members of Executive Committees. Steps will be taken to further increase their representation in Executive Committee and also to increase the number of councils headed by women. The present focus on women empowerment through buffer zone activities and income generation activities will be strengthened. The present practice of helping women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the sector of micro credit will be continued. Greater employment opportunities for women will be made available to improve their financial status and also to enhance their role in household decision making.



3.9. Tribal Development

Tribal communities live in harmony within the forests in the State. The efforts of the department will be to provide access to education, health, housing, water supply, electrification, roads and employment through livelihood opportunities with the overall objective of forest conservation, while ensuring their social and economic prosperity. The rich traditional knowledge of the tribal communities will be utilized effectively for the protection, regeneration and development of forests. While doing so, their customary rights and privileges would also be protected by providing them the Non Timber Forest Produce collection, sale rights supported by adequate market avenues.

An integrated approach with all concerned departments shall be adopted to bring in synergistic development of tribal communities in the forests and in the immediate vicinity of the forests. The Scheduled Tribe and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognitions of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 would be implemented in letter and spirit for the betterment of their Socio-Cultural and economic conditions and judicious balance between environment conservation and tribal welfare would be achieved.

3.10. Technology support – Research and Development for scientific forest management

3.10.1 Research on Forestry shall guide the management of forests and wildlife for the security of the ecosystem through sound strategies and technologies, which shall guide the preparation of the working plans/management plans. Research in areas of Biodiversity Conservation and Wildlife Management, shall be organized through in-house research wing / Wildlife wing and also in collaboration with reputed research / wildlife institutions.

3.10.2. Research would provide technological support to agro-forestry, promote socio-economic development, environmental improvement and forest based activities in the State. It will support forestry extension, train and guide field staff in executing the scientifically acceptable and adoptable management practices.

3.10.3. The thrust areas of forest research shall be Ecosystem management including conservation of endangered flora and fauna, restoration of degraded ecosystems, tree breeding and tree improvement, Agroforestry, Watershed Management, Coastal afforestation, Utilization



and marketing, Soil Nutrient and Problematic Site Management, and Socio-economic issues. The State Forest Research Institute and Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation and Research shall be developed as Centres of Excellence so that it can provide the technical and scientific input needed by the Forest Department.

3.10.4. Forest Database:

- (i) Data on forestry resources and forest management is of vital importance. Such data shall be collected, collated and updated periodically by using modern technology and tools with quick retrieval facilities. For this purpose, advanced technological applications such as Remote Sensing and Geographical Information System, and Management Information System will be used. The Geographical Information System laboratory will be equipped to provide inputs for management issues. The database and expertise of the Forest Department will be shared with other departments also like Revenue, Survey and Settlement etc., and their database will be reconciled and areas of demarcation of forest lands will be reviewed periodically.
- (ii) E-Governance: All divisions / circles will be connected through Internet / Intranet facilities for day-to-day administration. Video-conferencing facility will be established at division / Circle level offices for better communication, transmission and review of projects. Tamil Nadu Forest Academy, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu Forest College, Vaigai Dam, and all the Extension Centres will have virtual class room facilities through Educate Connectivity for training and dissemination of information. Personal Digital Assistant [PDA] will be provided at grass-root level with web-based Geographical Information System [GIS] facility for forest and wildlife management, fire alert, offence monitoring, wildlife movement and for better communication.

3.11. Ecotourism for supporting conservation

Ecotourism is defined as a purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of environment taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while providing economic opportunity to the local population, especially tribal communities, that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to them. In short it is nature based, ecologically sustainable programme supported by effective education, interpretation including the major components of benefits for the local community.



Ecotourism management will strive for:

- Eliciting the public support for the cause of conservation without disturbing the pristine nature of the forest ecosystem.
- To involve local communities in ecotourism for their economic prosperity and well being
- To provide an environment to appreciate wilderness, provide educational cum recreational experience.

Following strategies for promoting Ecotourism shall be implemented under the overall guidance of State Ecotourism Policy

- Forest Department promoted Ecotourism based on appropriate guidelines and conducted within carrying capacity of the location.
- Participatory approach through Forest Department-Local Community linkages, and involving local Government institutions.

3.12. Human Resource Development for forestry management

3.12.1. Forestry involves multi-disciplinary approaches and linkages and understanding of traditional and modern forest management practices. Therefore there is a need to update knowledge and skills in all spheres of forestry. With the increasing threat to biodiversity and the latest techniques involved in wildlife management, the advent of Joint Forest Management [JFM], human resource development is vital. Efforts will be taken to increase the number of women in the forest force especially in field of forest protection and management.

3.12.2. Existing institutions, namely, Tamil Nadu Forest Academy, Coimbatore and the Tamil Nadu Forestry College, Vaigai Dam shall be strengthened to provide much needed scientific and technical support to forestry personnel. The departmental staff and officers shall be exposed to emerging trends in forest management through training programmes at reputed national and international institutions.

Forestry training institutions shall also be strengthened to cultivate professionalism in the service. Organizational needs of the Forest Department and the needs of the personnel will be



analyzed and matched to develop appropriate capacity building programmes including training. Career prospects of all the personnel will be given specific focus in the development programme of the department. Filling up of vacant posts of forest personnel will be prioritized.

4. INCREASE BUDGETARY (FINANCIAL) SUPPORT FOR FORESTRY SECTOR

The objectives of the forest policy can be achieved only with substantial investment of financial and other resources. Forests shall not be looked upon as a source of revenue but to be viewed as a renewable natural resource. Forest is a national asset to be protected and enhanced for the wellbeing of the people and the State, on a sustainable basis. There is a need for enhancement of investment of public funds in forestry.

The National Forestry Commission has recommended for allocating 2.5% of the budget for forest and wildlife improvement. The State Government will strive to increase the budget allotment to the Forest Department every year so as to fulfill the goals of this policy, with due regard to the fiscal constraints that may exist from year to year.



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