

Green cover battling for survival in Karnataka

[Mohit M. Rao](#) Bengaluru, December 10, 2015

Moderately dense forest has declined by nearly 30,000 acres in the State



Eucalyptus trees at Turahalli forest in south Bangalore. — File Photo: K. Murali Kumar

Though the gentle slopes of the Western Ghats form its backdrop, an astounding 263 sq. km. of dense forest cover in Shivamogga district has given way to plantations or fields over the past four years.

At the southern end of Karnataka, the rapidly-concretising State capital has lost tree cover that is more than 15 times the size of Lalbagh and Cubbon Park — Bengaluru's two proud green spaces — combined since 2013.

This battle for the survival of trees has been tabulated by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), which observed tree cover through satellite imagery.

While the very “dense forest” (defined as more than 70 per cent tree cover in a patch of land) remains steady, what is worrisome is the stark reduction in “moderately dense forest” (defined as between 40 per cent and 70 per cent tree cover in a patch of land). The latter, found in the lower reaches of Western Ghats, have declined by nearly 30,000

acres. Dense forests form only 4 per cent of the total forest area in the State.

However, this has been accompanied by a massive increase in “open forests” (between 10 per cent and 40 per cent tree cover) that are either afforested land or plantations. The tentacles of these forests stretch deep into the ghats in Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu districts and spread out in Shivamogga district.

All 12 districts that have seen “increase” in tree cover are those in the plains of Karnataka where “natural forests” are few. T.V. Ramachandra from the Centre for Ecological Sciences in Indian Institute of Science said this was proof of degradation of forests observed in many districts.

Plantations

Vinay Luthra, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force), says large-scale replanting of eucalyptus and acacia plantations may have led to the perception of lower greenery in the State. While pressures on green spaces existed outside protected areas, he believed the dense forests were seeing an improvement.

Bengaluru has lost tree cover that is more than 15 times the size of Lalbagh and Cubbon Park combined since 2013

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