



SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
COMMUNICATION

**AAETI**



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# DownToEarth

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# MISSING



ENERGY

**Companies bet on battery prototypes as search for new technology heats up**

P20

AGRICULTURE

**Long-term studies prove organic and natural farming profitable**

P40

One-third of the country's recorded forests

## Missing forests?

- Our analysis finds that India is “missing” a 25.87 million hectares of forest. This is the difference between what is ‘recorded’ as forest area and the actual forest cover on that recorded area.
- The recorded forest area is 77.53 million ha.
- But the forest cover on these lands is 51.66 million ha – as much as 34 per cent of the area classified as forests is missing in the assessment.
- The State of Forest Report 2021 does not explain what is the state of this forest land – equal in size to the state of Uttar Pradesh.

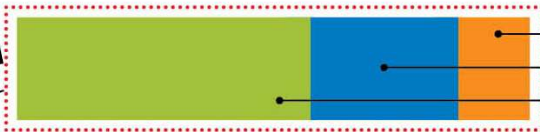
## OVERALL NUMBERS

A massive 25.87 million ha forests, or one-third of India's recorded forest area, has not been assessed in the government's latest survey

**328.74 million hectares** total geographic area of country

Recorded forest area (RFA)\* in 2021

**77.53 million ha | 23.5%** of India's area



**44.22 million ha**  
Reserve forests

**21.22 million ha**  
Protected forests

**12.07 million ha**  
Unclassed forests

RFA with forest cover# in 2021

**51.66 million ha | 15.7%** of India's area



**25.87 million ha**  
missing area^

RFA without forest cover



Forest cover outside RFA

\*RFA: All areas recorded as 'forests' in government records, and consists of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests; #Forest cover: All land of more than 1 ha with over 10% tree canopy density; ^Difference of RFA and forest cover on RFA; Source: India State of Forest Report 2021; Note: Numbers may not sum to the totals indicated due to rounding off

Always missing/now digitized boundaries available..**but still where is it?**

- It could be argued this forest cover was always 'missing' and that it was not possible to assess what was 'inside' or 'outside' because forest boundaries were not digitized.
- And that now this is done, the forest survey can tell us that 28 per cent of the forest cover in the country is on lands outside the control of the forest department.
- ***But this leaves the unanswered question:*** what is the state of this massive land area under control of the forest department, which does not even get classified as scrub in the forest cover assessment.

## COUNT AND ADD

Almost a quarter of India is under forest cover if trees outside forest are counted

**328.74 million hectare** total geographic area of the country

Trees outside forests (ToF\*) and forest cover# inside and outside recorded forest area (RFA^)

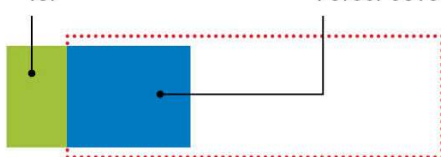
**29.32 million ha** (**8.9%** of India's total area or **36%** of its green cover)

**9.6 million ha**

ToF

**19.72 million ha**

Forest cover outside RFA



**71.38 million ha Total forest cover 2021**  
(**24.6%** ToF and forest cover inside and outside RFA as % of India's area)

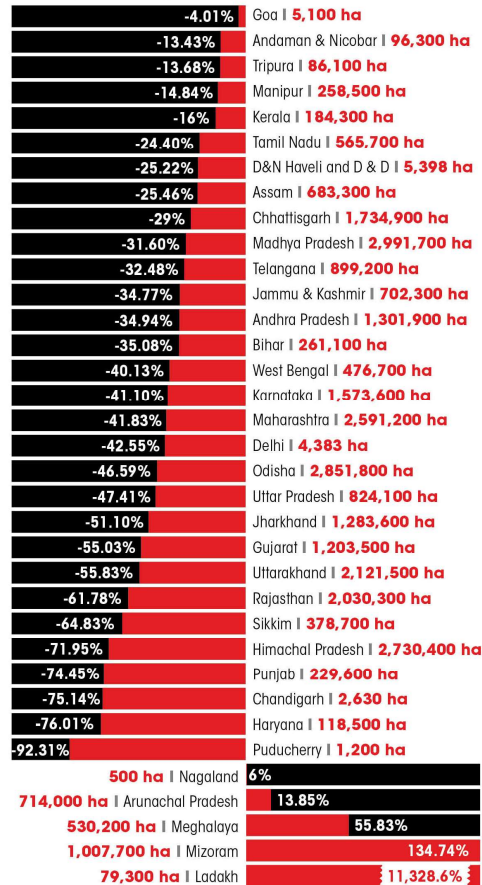
\*ToF: patches of trees and isolated trees on areas less than 1 hectare; #Forest cover is all land of more than 1 ha with over 10% tree canopy density; ^RFA: All areas recorded as "forests" in government records, and consists of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests; Source: India State of Forest Report 2021

## PRIME LOSERS

State-wise break-up of 25.87 million ha forests gone missing from the government's latest assessment

■ Missing forest cover\* as % of the state's recorded forest area\*

00 Missing forest cover (in hectare) from recorded forest area

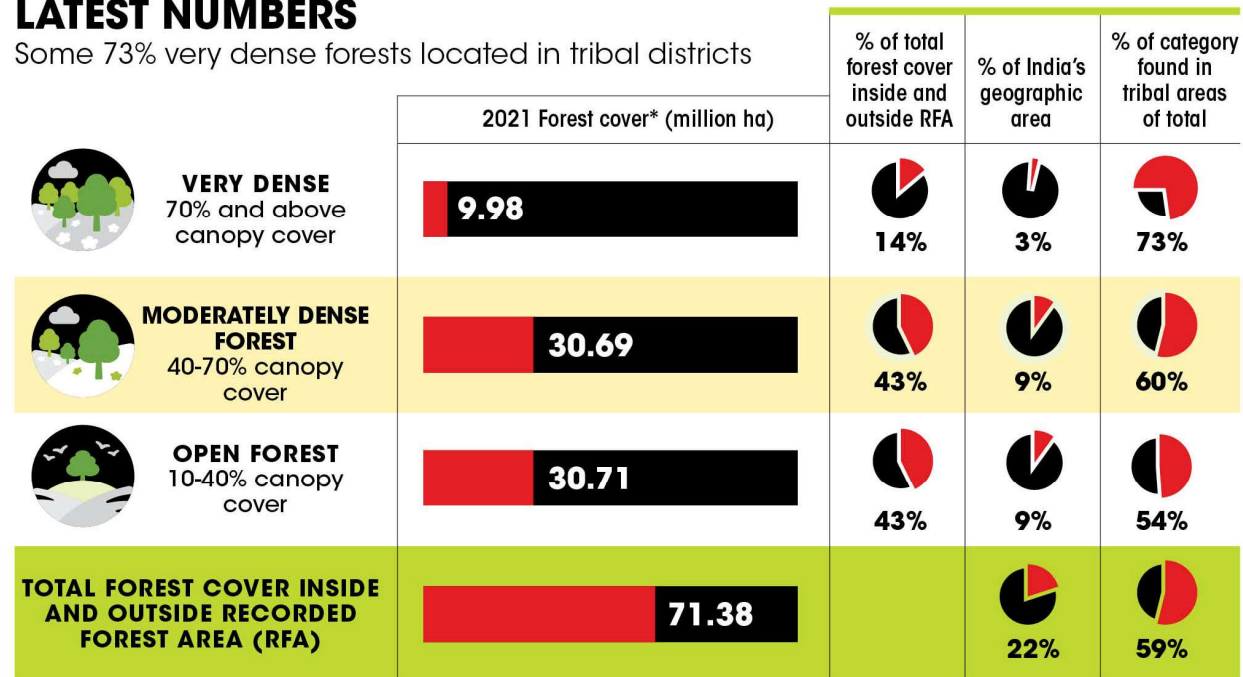


\*Missing forest cover is the difference of recorded forest area (RFA) and the forest cover on RFA;  
Forest cover: All land of more than 1 ha with over 10% tree canopy density; RFA: All areas recorded as  
"forests" in government records, and consists of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests;

# State of forest cover: where and how much

## LATEST NUMBERS

Some 73% very dense forests located in tribal districts



\*Forest cover is all land of more than 1 ha with over 10% tree canopy density; \*RFA: All areas recorded as "forests" in government records, and consists of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests; Source: India State of Forest Report 2021



## OUTWARD GROWTH

Increase in forest cover inside recorded forest area between 2019 and 2021 has been insignificant, while the growth outside is 0.76%, driven primarily by open forests

RECORDED FOREST AREA (RFA*)	FOREST COVER# INSIDE RFA (in million ha)			FOREST COVER OUTSIDE RFA (in million ha)		
	2019	2021	% change	2019	2021	% change
<b>Very dense forest</b> (70% and above canopy cover)	8.73	8.77	<b>+0.48</b>	1.19	1.20	<b>+1.4</b>
<b>Moderately dense forest</b> (40-70% canopy cover)	24.07	23.96	<b>-0.46</b>	6.78	6.73	<b>-0.71</b>
<b>Open forest</b> (10-40% canopy cover)	18.86	18.93	<b>+0.38</b>	11.58	11.78	<b>+1.62</b>
<b>Total forests</b>	<b>51.66</b>	<b>51.66</b>	<b>+0.00</b>	<b>19.55</b>	<b>19.72</b>	<b>+0.76</b>

\*RFA: All areas recorded as 'forests' in government records, and consists of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests; #Forest cover:

Any land more than 1 ha with over 10% tree canopy density; Source: India State of Forest Report 2021; Note: Numbers may not sum to the totals indicated due to rounding off

# Agenda for forests

- **Agenda 1: Protect the very dense and ecologically significant forests through ecosystem payments.** T
- The very dense forests – with canopy cover of 70 per cent or more are just 3 per cent of India's land area – but the bulk of this (over 70 per cent) is found in districts classified as 'tribal' – where more often than not the poorest of India live.
- The agenda then is the protection of this remaining very high-quality forests – needed for ecological security, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration. But we must do this so that communities who live near these forests get true value-based ecosystem payments for their role in protection and loss of livelihoods.
- The compensatory payments evolved by the 12<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission, must be reworked for this, with real intent and real funds which are transferred to the communities as ecosystem payments.

## Agenda 2: Focus on the lands inside – under the control of the forest department.

- This missing 25.87 million ha – must be regenerated.
- While it is great that forests are growing outside because people are planting trees, even plantations on their lands, it is time to talk about what is happening 'inside' the lands held by the forest department and classified as forests.
- But we also know that forest regeneration on forest land is not possible without the active involvement of local communities. Felling of trees is not the problem, the problem is our inability to replant and regrow forests.
- This is why working with local communities needs seriousness of intent so that people get rights not just over the grass and minor forest produce but also the right to cut and sell the trees when they are ready for harvest.

## Agenda 3: End the license raj on trees outside forests

- The good news is that people are planting trees – on their farm lands, in their backyard.
- But the bad news is that this is happening against all odds.
- In the highly restrictive conditions today, it is literally a crime to fell a tree even if you have planted it on your land.
- Under the IFA 1927, timber or other produce derived from trees outside forests are treated as forest produce.
- There is a maze of conditions that lead to harassment and corruption as the farmer, who has planted a tree as a bank account – to be harvested for any exigency – is confronted with.
- We need to build a wood-based economy once more – in ways in which it benefits both people and nature.