

Forest



The primary concern of the Forest Department is to implement policies and programmes relating to conservation of the country's natural resources more particularly its biodiversity, forests and wildlife. While implementing the policies and programmes, the department is guided by the principles of sustainable development by extensive afforestation and facilitating biodiversity conservation.

1. West Bengal has recorded forest land of 13.4% of its geographical area. This forest cover also includes the mangrove forests of Sundarban region. In spite of limited recorded forest land in the state, a large portion of forest and tree cover can be attributed to people's participation in Social Forestry as well as resuscitation of the degraded forest land through Joint Forest Management. West Bengal is rich in biodiversity. The main strategy for conserving its unique biodiversity has been through protection of national parks, sanctuaries, biosphere reserves, and identified wetlands and coastal areas. The state has 4064 sq. km. of forests under protected areas, which is 34% of the state's total forest area and 4.54% of the total geographical area. There are five National Parks, fifteen Sanctuaries, two Tiger Reserves, and one Biosphere Reserve.

During the previous year the thrust was on following issues (1) afforestation to increase green cover and to facilitate biodiversity conservation, (2) protection and development of forests and wildlife, (3) involvement of Joint Forest Management Committees for afforestation and protection, (4) socio-economic development of forest villages and fringe population, (5) forestry Research for improvement of plantation forests, (6) capacity building of forest personnel for better management, (7) infrastructure development for protection of forests and wildlife, (8) conservation of medicinal plants and value-addition of non timber forest produce (NTFP), (9) promote social / farm forestry and urban / recreation forestry, (10) soil and

moisture conservation, (11) eco-tourism development and involvement of JFM members in eco-tourism, and (12) awareness generation on forest and wildlife protection and Bio-diversity conservation.

The initiatives taken on various issues and some of the achievements are indicated below:

- The Directorate of Forests and its subordinate offices have been brought under the ambit of treasury system for better & uniform financial management of some expenditures with effect from 1st April, 2012
- Nurseries are being raised, under various State Plan Schemes, for creation of 9400 ha. of plantations during 2012 planting season.
- Another 6000 ha. of plantations, including national plantations under Farm Forestry, will be raised during 2012 under schemes like MGNREGS, National Afforestation Programme and other Centrally Sponsored Schemes.
- 2. Around 1430 nos. of applications for secondary license under Sawmill Regulation Rules have been approved by the State Level Committee and the same have been forwarded to the Authorised Officers for granting a fresh license. This matter was pending for a long period.
- An amount of Rs.4.5 crores have been disbursed to the people living in the forest fringe areas, as part of compensation for crop damage and human death due to wildlife depredation. Initiatives have been taken to make payment for compensation to the beneficiaries through the banks / account payee cheques to increase transparency in such payments.
- West Bengal now has 4386 Joint Forest Management Committees also known as Forest Protection Committees and Eco-Development Committees. They

actively participate for regeneration, protection and conservation of the forests in the state. The Committees have been modified to include representatives of MLAs in the JFMC Executive Committees.

- The Forest Directorate since 2009-10, is implementing the Housing Department Scheme for economically weaker section (EWS), named as 'Geetanjali' (formerly known as 'Amar Bari'). Under this scheme fund for construction of 2400 dwelling units were received during 2011-12.
- RIDF Scheme with 24 projects were operational in 13 districts of West Bengal. Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana (RKVY) schemes were also implemented by the Directorate.
- Activities have been taken up with funds from under 13th Finance Commission for preparation and implementation of Working Plan, afforestation & regeneration, habitat improvement, infrastructure maintenance & development, reduction of man-animal conflict and Joint Forest Management.
- West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Ltd. (WBFDC) has procured honey from Sundarbans through the Forest Protection Committees and sold them under the brand name MOUBAN. Initiative has been taken to promote citronella, turmeric and various medicinal plants.
- WBFDC now runs its eco-tourism activities at 20 resorts: 17 in North Bengal 3 in South Bengal with a total capacity of 380 beds.
- West Bengal Wasteland Development Corporation Ltd. Established in 1989 was almost non-functional in the past, has been activated recently. During 2011-12 it has undertaken afforestation scheme on wastelands belonging to poor farmers in the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Birbhum of nearly 1100 ha. The Corporation has been recently entrusted to support the management of parks and gardens under the Forest Directorate.
- West Bengal Zoo Authority (WBZA) was constituted in 2009-10 with both Alipore and Darjeeling under the Authority. The foot fall in Alipore Zoo was 21.65 lakhs during 2011-12. Several new projects like new entrance plaza, aviary for aquatic birds, tiger and leopard enclosures, reptile-park, lesser cat enclosure and the central food plaza are near completion. The Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Darjeeling is one of the premier zoos in the world and

is a member of the 'World Aquarium and Zoo Association', being one of the only three zoos in India with this honour. Last year, the Zoo has commissioned the Pheasant breeding center at Dow Hill. This year all the remaining 10 mini-zoos of the state have been brought under the management control of the WBZA.

- Agreement for Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) sponsored West Bengal Forestry and Bio-diversity Conservation Project, for a total amount of Rs.406 crores, have been signed on 29th March, 2012. This is an externally aided project which has been sanctioned for West Bengal Forest Deptt. after nearly 2 decades. The total project cost is Rs.406 crore which will be spent in 8 years, of the amount Rs.345 crore will be provided by JICA as a soft loan to be paid in 40 years.
- Rhino census has been conducted in Gorumara N.P. during March 2012 and the estimated population has gone up from 35 to 42. 1st phase census of Red Panda in Singalila N.P. have been completed and the 2nd phase is under progress. For the first time, Indian Bison (Gaur) census has been done in Gorumara N.P. during March 2012 and the estimated population is around 700 plus. A crocodile census has been conducted in Sundarban Tiger Reserve during February-March 2012.
- Sundarban West Sanctuary, in 24-Parganas South Forest Division of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve, has been approved for constitution.
- The Nature Interpretation Centre has been constructed in Jorbungalow for the Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary.
- A large grant project for Sundarban has been sanctioned by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) in March 2012.
- A major eco-tourism development activity has been taken up in Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas through the participation of Lamahata Forest Protection Committee.
- Old Takda Club in Darjeeling, established in around 1910, has been taken over possession by Forest Deptt. and the same is being converted into a eco-tourism resort.
- Major Rural Development Activities, around the forest fringes, have been taken up under CSS-Integrated Action Plan and fund from Paschimanchal Unnayan Affairs Deptt. in the districts of Paschim Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia.

- A world bank aided coastal Zone Management Programme has been initiated in Purba Medinipur Forest Division from 2011-12 financial year.
 - A work programme has been initiated by Urban Recreation Forestry Division for construction of a memorial park in New Town, Kolkata for the purpose of planting of trees by dignitaries visiting Kolkata.
3. The Citronella grass and turmeric plants - It has been cultivated in 130 hectares of land and 10 hectares of land respectively in North Bengal. The Citronella grass has also been cultivated on experimental basis in South Bengal. Two new derivatives of Citronella Oil, Phenyl, and Hand-wash have been introduced.
 4. Four sale centres for sawn timber have been re-opened at Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Bhuttabari and Kurseong.
 5. The trademark 'Banaja' for the Non Timber Forest Produce (N.T.F.P) has been registered. Four new herbal products have been launched, viz. Trikatu Churma, Neem Oil, Arjun Tea and Ayurvedic Shampoo.
 6. Two new sale-counters of forest products have been opened. To test the quality, a laboratory has been set up at the growing centre of Ayurvedic vegetations.
 7. This Department has to intervene in man-wild animal conflict on several occasions. To mitigate this, a Wildlife Squad has been opened.
 8. Conservation of Tiger Reserve at Sundarban is a major programme of this Department. For this purpose several measures like anti-poaching, behavioral studies of tigers, improvement of sweet water pond etc. have been taken up.
 9. A new Eco-tourism Centre has been opened for the tourists at the Garochira village near Birpara in Jalpaiguri districts & Capacity of eco-tourism resorts has been enhanced by permanent addition of 12 beds and temporary addition of 104 beds.
 10. River Dam - 3 km. River Dam Project has been materialized with Boulder-pitching in Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri District. Besides, small Check Dams have been built in various districts.

