

## **Protection, Conservation and Development of Forests in Goa**

The State of Goa has forest coverage of 1,224.46 sq km under three categories (Reserve Forest- 251.44 sq km, Protected Forest- 711.44 sq km and Unclassed Forest- 261.58 sq km) apart from private forests of 200 sq km, which together represent 38 *per cent* of the geographical area (3,702 sq km) of the State. There is one National Park, six Wildlife Sanctuaries and one Zoo in the State, covering an area of 754.91 sq km. The management of forests in the State is regulated by the Indian Forests Act, 1927, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Goa, Daman and Diu Preservation of Trees Act, 1984 and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The major functions of the department involve protection, conservation and development of forests; conservation of wildlife and management of protected areas; undertaking soil conservation and water harvesting measures to ensure sustained supply of natural resources; rescue and rehabilitation of wild animals etc. These functions are discharged by carrying out activities like rehabilitation of degraded forests; afforestation of denuded lands; supply of timber and fuelwood; urban forestry, protection of wildlife and development of habitats, etc.

### **Audit objectives**

The objectives of the performance audit were to assess:

- whether a forest policy was in place to protect and restore forests
- whether planning and execution of the programmes were adequate
- whether financial control and fund management were adequate
- whether schemes were implemented economically, efficiently and
- effectively as per the prescribed conditions
- whether human resource management was adequate
- whether an effective monitoring mechanism and internal control system was in place.

### **Audit findings:**

Despite a lapse of five years from the time the National Forest Commission recommended formulation of the State Forest Policy, the State had not notified its Forest Policy. The working plans of the North and South territorial divisions were pending approval of Government. The department did not prepare Management Plans for the five Wildlife Sanctuaries and one National Park. There was delay in notifying the forest areas thereby hampering the protection of these areas, and its consequent conservation and development. Incorrect levy of security deposit on trees permitted to be cut instead of on trees to be replanted resulted in short recovery of ₹ 2.88 crore as security deposit during the period 2005-11. There were delays in utilisation of funds under the Centrally sponsored schemes meant for protection of forests, their conservation and development resulting in the department losing funds from the Centre. Mutation in land records was not completed despite High Level Committee directions of May 2007. Conservation of forests suffered due to poor implementation of the Preservation of Trees Act, 1984 and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

Compensatory afforestation charges recoverable from user agencies on diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes were not revised from 2002, despite increase in daily wage rates. Independent monitoring and evaluation of works under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority was not carried out by the department. In 70.12 *per cent* cases of works of raising and maintenance of plantations, the estimates were sanctioned after commencement of the works while in 12.80 *per cent*, the estimates for the works were sanctioned after completion of the works during 2008-11. None of the divisions prepared work completion reports. Survival reports in respect of plantations carried out were not available in 143 out of 162 cases during 2006-11 and the shortfall in conducting inspection of plantations was 77.31 *per cent*. The provisions of the Preservation of Trees Act, 1984 pertaining to replanting of trees for conservation of forest were poorly enforced. Shortfall in compensatory afforestation further hampered the conservation of forest cover in Goa.