

1st INDIAN FOREST CONGRESS – ADOPTION OF CHARTER

Whereas, the United Nations has declared 2011 as International Year of Forests, and India is completing 150 years of the forestry, the 1st Indian Forest Congress was organized by Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun in collaboration with Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India in New Delhi from 22 to 25 Nov 2011. The central theme of the congress was ‘**Forests in a Changing World**’. Pre-congress workshops were organised by five institutes of ICFRE on the themes of the congress i.e. ‘Forests in society’ by TFRI, Jabalpur, ‘Forests in an expanding economy’ by AFRI, Jodhpur, ‘Expanding frontiers of forestry science’ by IWST, Bangalore, ‘Forest biodiversity and landscape’ by RFRI, Jorhat, and ‘Forests and climate change’ by HFRI, Shimla. More than 600 abstracts of papers were received and after screening by the expert committee, 450 abstracts were selected for oral and poster presentations.

The event was inaugurated on 22 Nov 2011 by **Ms. Jayanthi Natarajan**, Hon’ble Minister of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India. Three **publications of ICFRE** viz. “Voices from the Field”, “Status of JFM in India” and “ICFRE Technologies in the Service of the Nation” were released by the chief guest during the opening ceremony.

The congress published a daily News Bulletin to highlight the important events/proceedings at the congress and keep the delegates abreast of all sessions and activities.

The delegates of 1st Indian Forest Congress unanimously adopted the following **‘Indian Forest Congress Charter 2011’**:

1. In order to achieve the ‘Millennium Development Goals’, inter-alia for reducing poverty, it is necessary that enhanced and need-based investment is made in the forestry sector. The contribution of the forestry sector to India’s GDP is under-rated (only 1.7%) which represents the sector inadequately and needs to be properly assessed and authenticated. Valuation of forest ecosystem services, eco-tourism, water and soil-conservation, grazing and fuel-wood as well as income generation through forest based product’s processing and of forest-based industry should also be included as contribution of forestry sector to GDP. A system of natural resource accounting which accounts for enhanced forest and related resource capital needs to be set in place and accordingly need-based investment in forestry sector should be made as proposed by Forestry Working Group, set up by the Planning Commission for drafting the XII plan for forestry sector, commensurate with contribution of this sector.

2. Wider stakeholder consultation is necessary for evolving policy options in forest conservation and sustainable management. The Government of India established the ‘Central Board of Forestry’ in 1950 with the Minister as chairperson and state forest ministers and independent experts as members. However, the board did not function after 1988 following the approval of Forest Policy 1988 and adoption of JFM approach. The Central Board of Forestry should be revived as an apex body to be headed by the Prime Minister to ensure involvement of all stakeholders regarding national forest policy and strategic issues.

3. There is a need to give a push to futuristic research in frontline themes like tree genetics and breeding, genomics, proteomics, genome mapping, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, bamboo, fibre, food, medicines and nutraceuticals from fungi, biofuels, and application of geomatics in forest survey and inventory so that future demand and expectations of the society from the forests are met sustainably. There is an urgent need to improve the forestry database and forest information system at the State/UT and district/division level of the country to make the forestry planning more effective. Application of the modern scientific tools, such as computer, remote sensing, GIS and GPS in data collection, storage, processing and analysis of the forest resource has to be accelerated in all the States/UTs. This will also help in making the working plans, management plan and micro-plans more accurate and fast.

4. The new futuristic management regime for the forests demands that proper study and assessment of ecosystem goods and services, including biodiversity, climate change, hydrology and NTFPs, provided by the forests should be undertaken to correctly assess the contribution of forests to the economy and social needs.

5. Forest vegetation and hydrology change monitoring is essential to know the impact of climate change on mitigation and adaptation. ICFRE and other research organizations should network and develop a focussed research programme on this subject. A task force for revisiting the forest types of the country should be set up by ICFRE to prepare baseline data on the changes and to bring them on par with international standards and meet the requirements of REDD⁺.

6. Forest extension activities need to be accelerated on priority. Only a few Van Vigyan Kendras (VVKs) and demonstration villages are presently functioning and helping in technology dissemination to stakeholders. In order to ensure that non-forest lands are brought under tree cover to meet the national target of bringing 33% land mass under forest/tree cover, more VVKs and Demonstration Villages should be established to give the desired impetus to agroforestry/farm forestry and also to 'Green India Mission'.

7. Special focussed efforts at the central and state levels are necessary for convergence between forestry activities and non-forestry land use/schemes for the regeneration of degraded fringe forests and upliftment of poor people particularly the tribals and others in the fringe villages.

8. The Joint Forest Management programme has clearly established its potential with proven facts that it is not only a sustainable forest management model but also an agent of overall socio-economic development of poor forest dependent communities. Forestry should be considered as part and parcel of development of the country. However, community based management systems need to be put in place with innovative scientific inputs for better productivity and ecological sustainability. Now, the time is ripe for second generation reforms in JFM. An expert group should be constituted for this purpose for developing the roadmap for reforms. JFM committees need to be adequately empowered to manage the forest resources, their capacity built up and legal backing given to them for their success. For the institutional strengthening of the JFMCs, local youth should be engaged to act as facilitators for better communication between forest departments, JFMCs and panchayats. A

National Institute for Research and Training on JFM and Forest Based Livelihoods may be set up for capacity building and technical support to the JFMCs. A federation of JFM committees should be created under the Union Minister of Environment and Forests for better coordination and policy inputs. The JFMCs should be legally empowered and maintained as a separate entity. Independent auditing of JFMCs should be introduced.

9. India, in spite of its large human and livestock population, is still able to support good floral and faunal biodiversity. However, human and wildlife conflicts are on the rise and timely steps are needed to minimize the conflicts. Eco-development activities in and around protected areas should be taken up in the 'XII Five Year Plan' on priority with sufficient allocation of funds to ensure sustainable wildlife management. The Wild Life Institute of India should bring out biennial assessment report on the status of the national parks and sanctuaries on the lines of the 'State of Forest Report' by FSI.

10. Each state of the country should have a well equipped research organisation to support forestry activities. Scientific human resource at ICFRE needs to be strengthened to cater to the new emerging areas of research. Existing human resource at the state level needs structural reform as the existing staff is unable to meet the future requirement of forest management.

11. The requirement of frontline staff is to be reassessed at beat levels upwards in the state to be manned by technology-savvy frontline staff with modern gadgets and headed by appropriate level of well trained

professionals for better delivery. A special provision in the 'XII Five Year Plan' is needed for restructuring the frontline organisation of forest departments across the country to meet the emerging expectations of the society. Similarly the training programmes of IFS and SFS officers and frontline staff need to be reoriented to meet the emerging requirements.

12. ICFRE, a premier organisation in forestry should play a lead role in networking with South Asian and other international research institutions for knowledge sharing, scientific exchange programmes and joint research plans. Similarly, the Forest Survey of India should be adequately strengthened to provide the latest technology support to the forestry sector.

13. It is noted that mining often causes serious disturbance to the environment and mineral maps and forest maps of the country overlap. Mining in forest areas should be done on scientific lines well supported with bioremediation. Presently, there is no foolproof system of scientific rehabilitation plan nor expert organisations are involved. This is leading to serious environmental degradation. The mining and restoration of mined out areas should go side by side. The feasibility of underground mining in forest areas should be studied through three-dimensional subsidence analysis especially for coal bearing forested regions so that better technology and forest restoration is employed in the mineral resource exploitation process. All proposals for transfer of forest land for mining should be submitted to MoEF with GIS based maps verified by the state forest department for consideration and future monitoring.

14. The provisions of ‘Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006’ aims at addressing the long standing insecurity of the tenure in cultivated lands in forest areas and legal right of the forest dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over the NTFPs, it is essential to use high resolution remote sensor imagery and GPS/PDA to prepare GIS based maps for clearly demarcating the land to all the forest eligible dwellers in a fair way and also to ensure that there is no scope for encroachment.

15. There is a need for extensive research in ecotourism viz. its potential, carrying capacity, socio-economic aspects, provision of eco-tax and payment of ecosystem services etc.

16. Forestry issues at the national level need to be inculcated in the developmental process holistically. In this context, it is necessary to professionalize the forestry sector and include forestry issues in policy, strategic planning and decision making for sustainable social and economic development.

17. ICFRE headquarters should be shifted to New Delhi for better coordination with national and international organisations.