

CHAPTER-I

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1.1 Article 48A of the Constitution of India stipulates that the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forest and wildlife of the country. Forest subserves the entire community and represent a community resource that meets the need of the millions of rural people especially the tribal communities.

Afforestation and Social Forestry Programme

1.2 The National Forest Policy (NFP), 1988 aims to substantially increase forest/tree cover in the country through afforestation and social forestry programme, especially on denuded, degraded and unproductive lands. The Government of Uttar Pradesh (GoUP) adopted and implemented the Uttar Pradesh Forest Policy in 1998. In 2017, the GoUP formulated and adopted its new State Forest Policy. Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GoUP (Forest Department) is mandated to manage, conserve and protect forest and wildlife resources in the State through afforestation and social forestry programmes for regeneration of degraded forest land as well as socio-economic upliftment of people and sustainable management of forest and wildlife.

According to the India State of Forest Report (ISFR)¹, 2021, Uttar Pradesh has forest cover of 14,817.89 sq. km. which is 6.15 *per cent* of the State's geographical area². In terms of forest canopy density classes, the State has 2,626.61 sq. km. under very dense forest (VDF)³, 4,029.37 sq. km. under moderately dense forest (MDF)⁴ and 8,161.91 sq. km. under open forest (OF)⁵ (**Chart 1.1**). The total forest cover in the State has increased by 139 sq. km.⁶ during 2017 to 2021. The forest cover outside the recorded forest area⁷ in the State increased⁸ by 239 sq. km. during 2017-2021, however, the forest cover inside recorded forest area decreased by 100 sq. km.⁹ (1.08 *per cent*) in the same period. Besides, the State has a tree cover of 7,421 sq. km. outside the recorded forest area.

¹ Forest Survey of India, an organisation of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, GoI has been monitoring India's forest and tree resources through periodic assessments and presenting the findings in its biennial publication 'India State of Forest Report' (ISFR).

² 2,40,928 sq. km.

³ All lands with tree canopy density of 70 *per cent* and above.

⁴ All lands with tree canopy density of 40 *per cent* and more but less than 70 *per cent*.

⁵ All lands with tree canopy density of 10 *per cent* and more but less than 40 *per cent*.

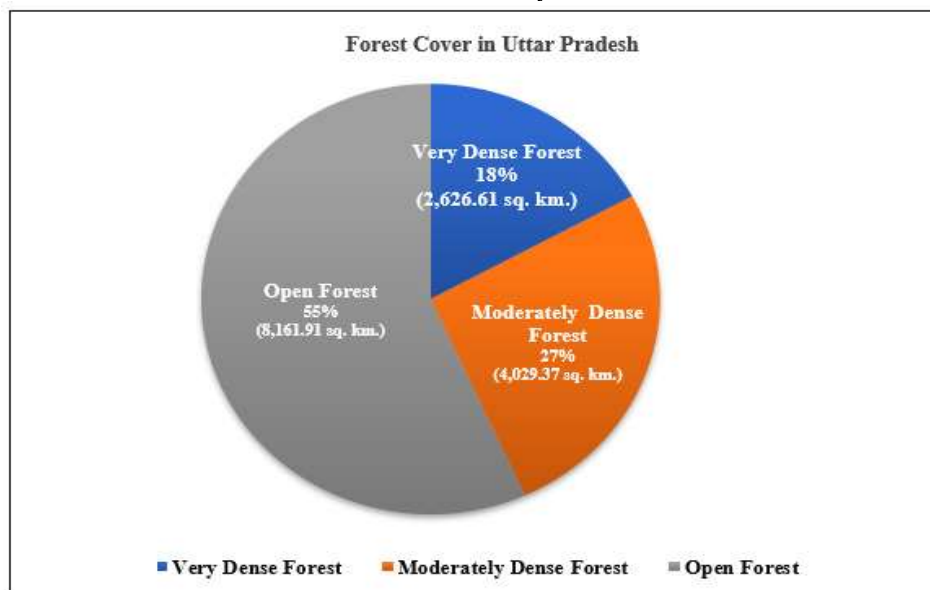
⁶ As per ISFR 2017, the total forest cover was 14,679.00 sq. km.

⁷ Recorded Forest Area refers to all the geographic areas recorded as 'Forest' in government records which largely consist of Reserved Forests and Protected Forests as constituted under the provisions of Indian Forest Act, 1927. Areas which have been recorded as forests in the revenue records or have been constituted under any other State Act or local law are also included in the recorded forest area.

⁸ Forest cover outside recorded forest area was 5,436 sq. km. in 2017 and 5,675 sq. km. in 2021.

⁹ As per ISFR, the forest cover inside recorded forest cover area was 9,243 sq. km. in 2017 and 9,143 sq. km. in 2021.

Chart 1.1: Forest cover density in Uttar Pradesh



Source: India State of Forest Report, 2021

The plantation activities in the State of Uttar Pradesh are funded through various Central and State Government schemes, such as Social Forestry, Green Belt Development Scheme, Total Forest Cover Scheme, Plantation under CAMPA and MGNREGS, etc.

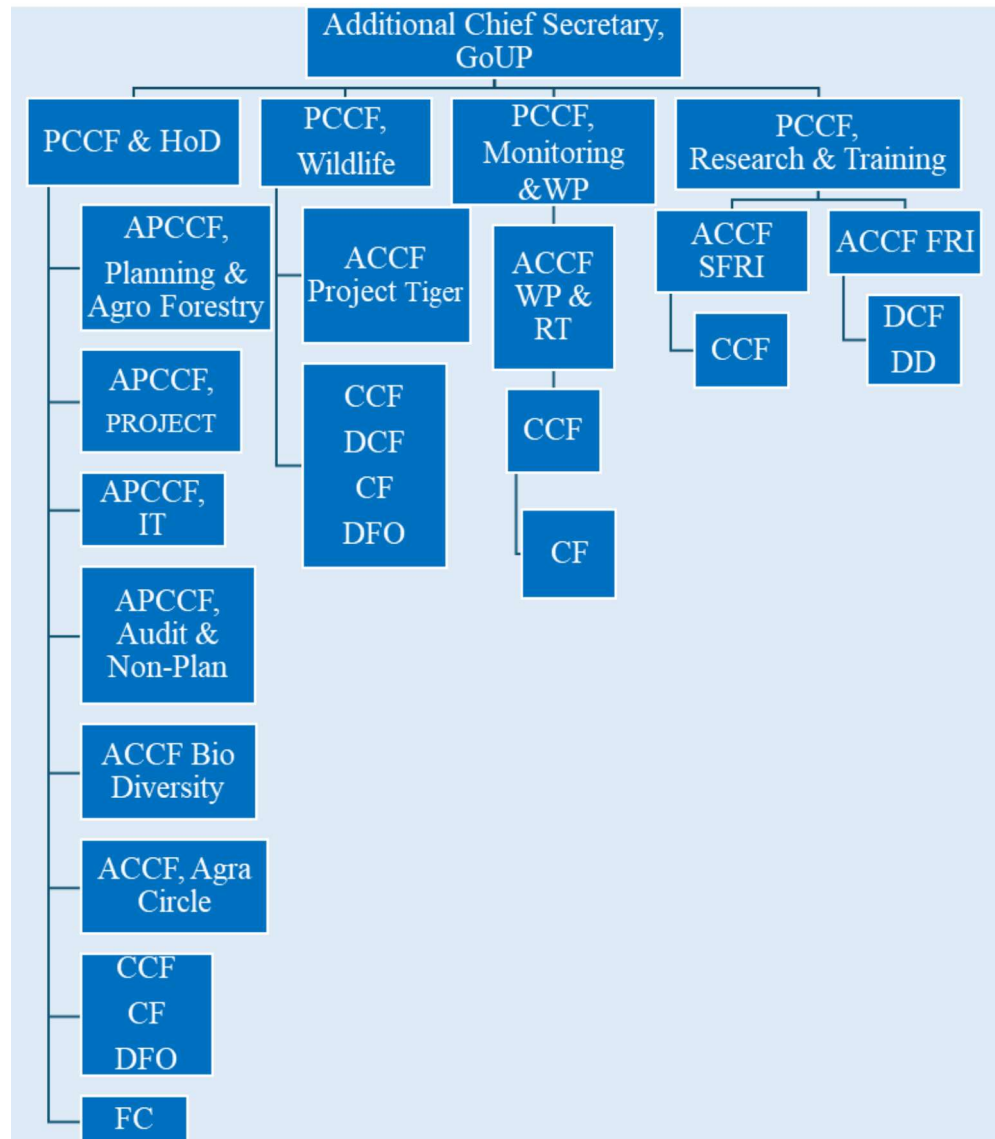
As per NFP, 1988, the national goal is to have a minimum of one-third of the total land area of the country under forest or tree cover. In the hills and in mountainous regions, the aim is to maintain two-third of the area under such cover in order to prevent soil erosion and land degradation and to ensure the stability of the fragile eco-system.

Organisational Set up

1.3 Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GoUP is the administrative head of the Forest Department. The four Principal Chief Conservators of Forest (PCCF) heads different wings of the Department as detailed in the **Chart 1.2** below. The PCCF are assisted by Additional PCCF/Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF). The field formations of the Department comprise of circles, forest divisions and wildlife divisions. At divisional level, Divisional Forest Officer (DFOs)/Divisional Director is In-charge of the Division who is responsible for all forestry activities along with the duty of Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO). Afforestation and plantation activities under various schemes are carried out by the Forest Department through its divisions.

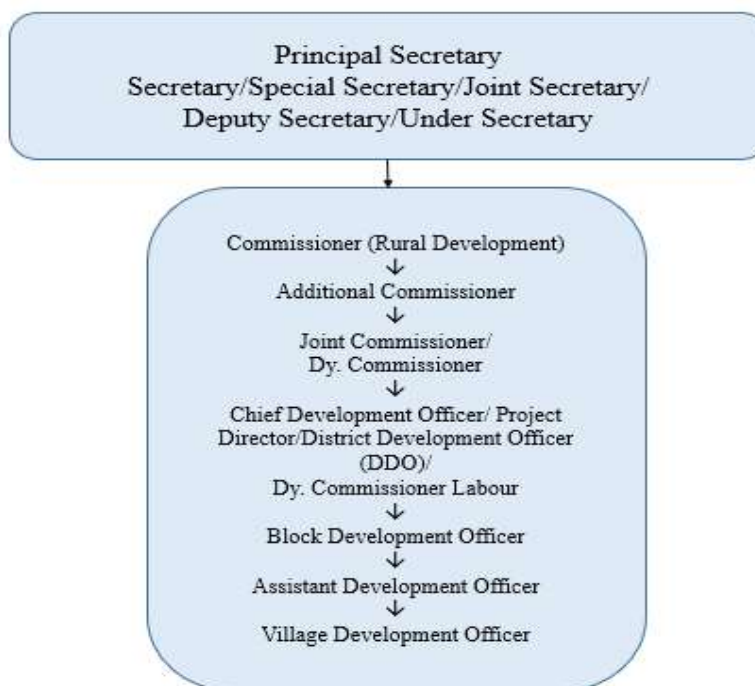
The organogram of the Forest Department, GoUP is given in **Chart 1.2** as follows:

Chart 1.2: Organogram of the Forest Department



Besides Forest Department, Rural Development Department (RDD) of GoUP carried out plantation works under MGNREGS to improve the eco-system as well as for employment generation at village level. The plantation activities in RDD were executed under Deputy Commissioner, Labour of the respective Districts. The organogram of the RDD is given in **Chart 1.3** below:

Chart 1.3: Organogram of the Rural Development Department



Audit Objectives

1.4 The audit has been conducted to assess whether:

- Working plans, action plans, schemes and programme relating to afforestation and social forestry were prepared timely and implemented economically, effectively and efficiently;
- Funds were available, fund flow was synchronised with plantation schedule and funds were utilised as per approved working plans and action plans by the Forest Department as well as by the other departments;
- The diversion of forest land and execution/renewal of lease was permitted as per extant laws/rules and conditions of such diversion were fulfilled; and
- The Department had adequate system for monitoring, evaluation and control in place.

Audit Criteria

1.5 The audit criteria have been derived from the following sources:

- Indian Forest Act (IFA), 1927;
- Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 as amended in the year 1988;
- Forest (Conservation) Rules, 2003;
- National Forest Policy, 1988 and Uttar Pradesh State Forest Policy, 1998 and 2017;
- National Working Plan Code, 2014¹⁰;

¹⁰ For sustainable management of forest and biodiversity in India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India adopted a uniform code *i.e.* the National Working Plan Code in 2014.

- *Paudhashala Digidarshika*, 2016¹¹;
- *Vriksharopan Samhita*, 2016¹²;
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005;
- MGNREGA Operational Guidelines, 2013;
- Guidelines on State CAMPA, 2009;
- Handbook of Guidelines 2004 and 2019 issued under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980;
- Guidelines of specific Schemes/ Projects/ Programmes; and
- Rules and Regulations and directives issued from time to time by the GoI and GoUP.

Scope and Methodology of Audit

1.6 In the Performance Audit, test check of records of the Forest Department relating to the plantation activities, land diversion cases, monitoring and evaluation, *etc.* for the year 2016-17 to 2021-22 was conducted (August 2021 to September 2022) by the Audit at the Headquarter of the Forest Department and 27 Forest Divisions in 22 districts¹³ selected (**Chart 1.4**) through stratified random sampling based on plantation and expenditure.

In RDD, the test check of plantation records for the period 2016-17 to 2021-22 were conducted by the Audit in these 22 sampled districts.

Chart 1.4: Selected Districts (yellow colour) for Audit



¹¹ Guidelines issued by the Forest Department for nursery management and preparation of high quality saplings based on modern technologies.

¹² Forest Department prepared *Vriksharopan Samhita* for plantation activity, latest nursery techniques and compilation of Government Orders.

¹³ Ambedkar Nagar, Amethi, Baghpat, Balrampur, Barabanki, Bareilly, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur Nagar, Lakhimpur Kheri, Lalitpur, Lucknow, Mahoba, Mathura, Mirzapur, Rampur, Shravasti, Siddharthnagar, Sitapur, Sonebhadra and Sultanpur. The selected districts have been depicted in yellow color in the Chart 1.4.

Before commencement of PA an Entry Conference was held on 13 July 2021 with the Forest Department and on 27 April 2022 with the Rural Development Department in which audit objectives, criteria and methodology were discussed. The audit findings were discussed in the Exit Conference held on 15 April 2023 and replies of the Government/Departments have been suitably incorporated in Report.

Scope limitations

1.7 Audit was constrained by the delays in furnishing records/responses by the auditee units. Besides, there were instances where the requisitioned records/information were not provided to Audit and, therefore, Audit could not scrutinise those records and audit opinion drawn in this report has been limited to that extent. The following records/information were not submitted to Audit by the Forest Department:

- Actual expenditure incurred on the plantation sites during 2016-17 to 2021-22;
- Details of expenditure on contractual manpower met from State CAMPA fund;
- Felling details executed in forest blocks of Forest Divisions.
- 25 Forest Divisions did not furnish records relating to forest clearance given to private entrepreneurs to Audit.

The following records were not submitted for audit by the Rural Development Department:

- Indents forwarded to Forest Department for saplings and Block/ Gram Panchayat wise receipts thereof.
- Records related to purchase of saplings from private nurseries.
- Records related to procurement of material for plantation.
- Correspondence files of plantation of Mathura district.
- Plantation files of Mahoba district.
- Plantation and survival report for the year 2017-18 to 2020-21 of Lucknow district.

Schemes for Afforestation and Social Forestry

1.8 Afforestation is the process of planting of new forests on lands which, historically, have not contained forests. Afforestation is usually more difficult than reforestation¹⁴ as it strives to reverse in a few years the ecological degradation which has taken place over ages. Artificial Regeneration (AR) is one such method of afforestation where artificial means to develop the plantation are involved. Under Social Forestry plantation activities are undertaken to meet the needs of people traditionally dependent on forest area. It also helps to reconstruct the eco-system and conserve the environment. It envisages use of community land, individual holding and other public land, denuded/degraded lands.

Plantation under various schemes in Uttar Pradesh is funded by Central/State Government through State Budget. Besides, Compensatory Afforestation (CA)

¹⁴ Reforestation refers to establishment of forest on land that had recent tree cover.

and Non-CA plantation¹⁵ is done in lieu of diversion of forest land for non-forestry use under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. State CAMPA functions as nodal agency for funding, overseeing and promoting Compensatory Afforestation and Non-CA plantation from the funds deposited in State CAMPA Fund by the user agencies.

Plantation is carried out on various type of community land, degraded forest land and land available on sides of canal, rail and road *etc.* to ensure the availability of timber, fuel, fodder, small forest produce, *etc.* in rural areas of all the districts in the State. In urban areas, ornamental and shady trees are planted on unused land alongside the roads and in parks for environment protection and beautification under the Social Forestry (Urban Areas) Scheme. Besides, the plantation under Social Forestry, Green Belt Scheme, Total Forest Cover Scheme *etc.* aims to maintain ecological balances and to increase forest cover in the State.

¹⁵ Compensatory afforestation is carried out from the funds deposited for site specific plantation whereas Non-CA plantation is carried out from the funds deposited towards Net Present Value (NPV) in CAMPA Fund by user agencies.