

VEGETATION STATUS IN DEGRADED FOREST, COMMUNITY AND PRIVATE LANDS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT: Some of the most degraded lands in the country are the common property resources, on which people have unfettered right of use. These resources include community pastures, community forests, wastelands and degraded forests where access rights are allowed. In spite of concerted efforts to check deforestation and the various afforestation schemes taken up during successive Plan periods, large tracts of forest and other land categories continue to be classified as degraded. There is a need to assess the status of lands potentially available for plantation activities and their current status. In this paper, the current vegetation status including the diversity, the biomass and carbon stocks of three land categories, *viz.*, degraded forestlands, degraded community lands and degraded private lands across three altitudinal zones of Himachal Pradesh is presented. Restoration of the degraded lands requires rigorous efforts to formulate management strategies that would help meet the fuelwood and fodder requirements of the communities residing close to these lands; and at the same time, promote tree diversity. An assessment of the status of degraded land categories are needed to identify hot spots and problem areas and coupled with such assessments there is also a need for socio-economic studies that try to understand the linkages between communities residing close to these degraded lands, their dependence and needs. Capitalizing on natural recovery mechanisms is urgently needed to prevent further irreversible degradation and to retain the multiple values of productive land.

Keywords: *Altitude, Degraded land category, Himachal Pradesh, Species richness and diversity*