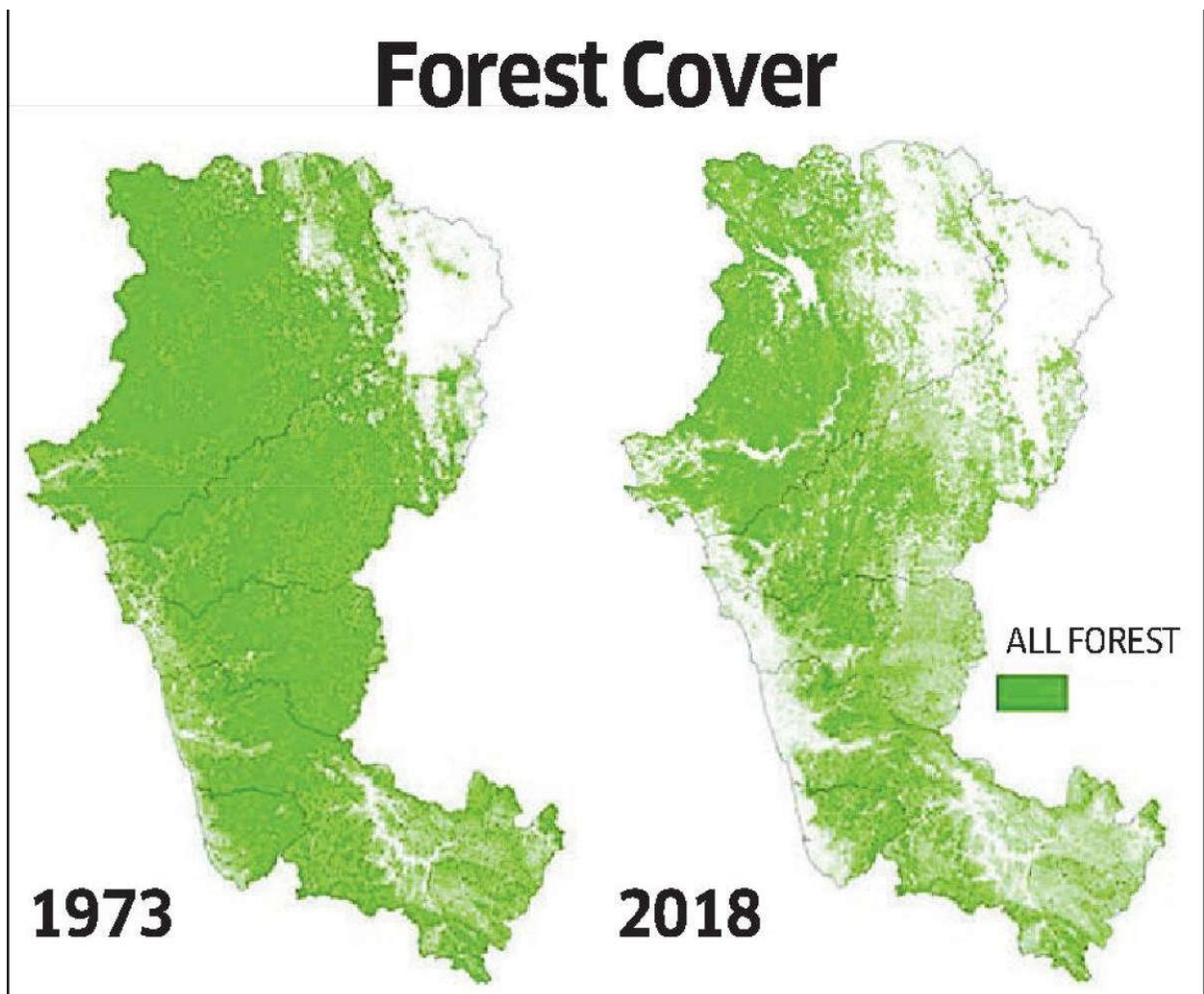


# Dramatic drop in Uttara Kannada's forest cover: study

Rasheed Kappan, DHNS, Bengaluru, May 23 2020, 00:02 ist updated: May 23 2020, 04:10 ist 3 minutes



Large-scale development activities led to massive degradation of forests in Uttara Kannada from a high 74.19% of the land area in 1973 to 48.04% in 2018, shows a new study by researchers of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur.

The research focussed on the landscape dynamics across the west-flowing major rivers of Uttara Kannada district, which falls under the Central Western Ghats. Led by Dr T V Ramachandra, the team had S Vinay, S Bharath, M D Subash Chandran and Bharath H Aithal.

The forest degradation was accelerated by the construction of dams, power projects, forest-based industries – paper mills, expansion of roads, urbanization, encroachment for horticultural and agricultural practices. The forests are currently confined to the Western Ghats and protected areas.

The study found that the evergreen forest cover in Aghanashini riverscape, for instance, declined from 72.15% (1973) to 24.09% (2018), while moist deciduous forest cover increased from 9.79% to 25.76% during this period.

The dramatic decline in forest cover coincided with a sharp increase in agricultural activity from 4.46% to 16.38% in the coastal regions. In the Western Ghats and transition zones to the east, horticulture practices (areca nut gardens) rose from 3.63% to 10.68%. This was particularly pronounced along the river valleys and stream courses.

During the period under study, urban growth picked up as indicated by an increase in built-up area from 0.1% to 4.87% in the proximity of the coast (Gokarna and Kumta) and along the Ghats (Sirsi).

Inevitably, this interior forest cover reduced dramatically from 73.28% to 17.78%. During the period, there was a marginal increase in edge forests (from 8.71% to 19.65%) and transitional forests (from 1.86% to 8.23%).

Construction of a series of dams in the Kali river basin at Supa, Kodalalli, Kadra, etc. resulted in the loss of forest cover (from 87.26% to 54.24%) and in particular evergreen forests (from 61.82% to 30.5%).

Encroachments were another big factor for degradation. “Due to availability of water and lack of appropriate regulatory mechanisms, there have been encroachments into the forests in the eastern part of the catchment (near Hubballi and Belagavi).”

These, the study found, led to an increase in agriculture and horticulture activities (17.02%–22.15%). “Overall, the forest cover in the Kali river basin has reduced.”