

Slight rise in mangrove forests in Eastern India

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While mangrove forests are vanishing around the world, the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests is reporting a slight uptick of mangrove forests along the nation's eastern coast. According to a report, mangroves expanded from 4,581 square kilometers in 2005 to 4,639 square kilometers in 2007, an increase of 58 square kilometers.

A press release states that "the increase in mangrove cover is mainly because of plantations and regeneration measures under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry." In addition, "state governments and their forest departments in the eastern coast region are taking necessary precautions to avoid encroachments and destruction of the mangrove forests."

Mangroves are tropical saline-adapted forests, which are becoming increasingly considered one of the world's most important ecosystems. These forests serve as nurseries for a variety of marine fish, underpinning global fisheries and providing additional food for coastal communities. In addition, they store massive amounts of carbon and act as buffers against marine erosion. Recent studies have even found that mangroves buffer human populations and property against tropical storms. During the devastating 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, regions with mangroves suffered less damage than those without. In all it has been estimated that mangroves provide at least \$1.6 billion in ecosystem services annually.

Yet despite their importance mangroves are vanishing rapidly due to rising sea levels, deforestation for coastal developments, agriculture and aquaculture. A recent study by the US Geological Survey and NASA found that 137,760 square kilometers of mangroves survive globally. Approximately 20% of the world's mangroves were lost from 1980.

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