

Three Days Training Programme for IFS on “Preparation of Ecosystem Health Card” From September 9-11, 2024 at Defence Institute of High-Altitude Research (DIHAR) Leh, Ladakh (UT)

Ecosystem health report cards are valuable tools for assessing and describing the ecosystem status, increasing public engagement and awareness, and also guiding policy-makers in management actions to improve the overall ecosystem health. Typically, report cards use indicators that are either with environmental focus or human focused (including social, economic, and cultural indicators). These groupings are flexible, and are based on the interests and values of the stakeholders involved. To the extent possible, report cards focus on indicators and metrics that are relevant to local management objectives, valued by stakeholders, and sensitive to change through management activities.



Dignitaries on the Dias: Inaugural Session

With this background a Three Day’s Training Workshop on ‘Preparation of Ecosystem Health Card’ for Officers of the Indian Forest Service, from September 9-11, 2024 at the Defence Institute of High-Altitude Research (DIHAR) Leh, which was sponsored by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India. 26 participants from 16 states across the country participated in the training programme, which included a mix of very senior



Sandeep Sharma, Director HFRI

officers with loads of experience from 1988-92 batches to young enthusiastic officers from 2018 batch. The Director, ICFRE-HFRI, Shimla **Dr. Sandeep Sharma**, welcomed the participants and provided the basic information on ecosystem health cards. He said that the ecosystem health is a crucial concept for understanding the well-being of our planet. It encompasses the intricate relationships between

living organisms and their physical environment, determining the sustainability of life on Earth. The Chief Guest of the occasion and also the main resource person, Dr. Sanjeeva Pandey (former PCCF, HP) Senior Forest Consultant, USAID Forest PLUS 3.0, highlighted the importance of biodiversity in forest management. His presentation focussed on Forest Management as an Indicator of Ecosystem Health Card, in context to Ladakh. His colleague from USAID-Forest PLUS 3.0, Ms. Mahima Sharma further deliberated on the Forestry Tech-Tools in support of Ecosystem Health Card, especially the Van App developed under the



MoEF&CC-USAID collaborative Forest PLUS Project.

Vaneet Jishtu, ICFRE-HFRI, Shimla

Sanjeeva Pandey, Forest PLUS 3.0

Dr. Vaneet Jishtu, the **Training Coordinator** presented a brief introduction to the Trans Himalayan cold desert landscape of Ladakh. He provided photographic impression depicting its key features and characteristics of the landscape - habitation, culture, agriculture, and unique biodiversity. He emphasised on the plant diversity- from the Trans Himalayan cold desert of Ladakh and the threats it is facing from the rising developmental works. He also emphasised the role of local communities in protecting and celebrating the floral elements. He stated that the “Ecosystem Health cards are useful for awareness raising, visioning, stakeholder engagement, collaboration generation, and improving conditions in socio-ecological systems”, ultimately benefitting all stakeholders for a healthy and sustainable life in future”. The core concept of Ecosystem Health Cards was a good step in assessing and communicating the condition and functioning of any ecosystem and this concept has been designed to provide a comprehensive, understandable, overview of an ecosystem’s health by evaluating various indicators.

Sh. B. M. Sharma, Chief Wildlife Warden UT Ladakh, co-host for the training highlighted role of the forest department in conserving biodiversity of the region, with special focus on the rare and endangered faunal species. He informed that the department has initiated various schemes to enhance the eco-tourism activities in specific destinations to attract tourism, and also enhance the local economy.



B.



M. Sharma

Gajendra Singh

Dr. Gajendra Singh Vishwakarma, Asst. Professor Ecosystem & Environment Management, IIFM Bhopal presented the 'Framework and Indicators for Ecosystem Health Card preparation. He said that ecosystem health indicators are measures which help us to better understand the ecosystem and where action is required to restore ecosystem health and its associated benefits. He informed about the software and tools used in the calculation of environmental indicators.

During the training, field visits were also organised to prominent Eco-tourism sites viz., Thickshey Gonpa, Meditation Centre, Confluence of Indus and Zanskar rivers, Magnetic Hill, Pather Sahib, Pangong Tso, Lamayuru, etc. Team Forest PLUS 3.0, and team ICFRE-HFRI made valuable contributions during the field visits and reiterated the importance of biodiversity and community's role on Ecosystem approach in Forest Resources management for formulizing the Ecosystem Health Card (EHC).

Pangong Tso



Meditation Centre



Pangong Tso Wetland in the Changthang Landscape

There was also a cultural programme to showcase the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Ladakh, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the participants and their families. This was followed by the customary Course Dinner wherein interaction of participants, local officers and resource persons shared their diverse experience for augmenting the 'Ecosystem Health Card', for sustainable development of Eco-tourism for the benefit of stakeholders.



Day three began with a special session devoted to career advancement of forest officers, which was chaired by Dr. Sanjeeva Pandey, Ex-PCCF (HP) and Forestry Consultant, Forest Plus 3.0, and the panel consisting of Sh. **Shrivastava**, Ms. Mita Banerjee, Sh. Shiv Pal, Ms. Shikha Mehra and Sh. Anil Joshi.





After thorough discussion amongst panellist, and inputs from the other participants a consensus emerged on the recruitment process and career advancement of forest officers. Recruitment or selection to the IFS/ SFS / field level officials is the starting point, that marks the basic level of acceptability - means selection of person with good aptitude and knowledge. Trainings need to be focused and updated according to the changing times and time has come to look at forestry from an ecosystem perspective, rather than just timber. Rigidity is no more workable in the forestry sector and it is the need to the hour for the forestry personnel to grasp all the intricacies of social change. Thrust needs to be climate change, carbon- sequestration and green credit programmes to develop a pool of officers in these areas. Effort should be in place for basic botany/forestry course of new recruits belonging to non- forestry fields. Training is the important mantra, and the bottom-line is - principle adopted should be that of **'Train Hard and**

- **Key Recommendations on the Trainings:**

- Trainings are conducive in development of skills provided these are theme and competence based and in concordance with the current challenges in forestry sector, area of interest etc.
- More emphasis should be given for inculcation of modern tools of IT in forestry sector in the areas like, monitoring of staff, geotagging and evaluation of plantation sites.
- Topics of training to be in sync with the changing times. Thrust to be climate change, carbon-sequestration and green credit programme to develop a pool of officers in these areas.
- Divisional Forest Level Officers (DFOs) and ACFS should be trained more as they know the field staff better and can pass on the knowledge to the field functionaries.
- Institutes and resources for imparting the training should be meticulously selected and areas of interest should be given preference.
- Training of officers in different areas is good only if they get chance to apply the knowledge in their working areas.
- Ecosystem is the buzzword in modern day forestry and the sector cannot work in isolation. There is a need to imply the wholistic perspective.
- Suggestions/ Recommendations of the training / workshops etc. should be considered seriously and in strict terms

Work Hard'.

Dr, Padma Gurmit, Director, National Institute of Sowa Rigpa (NISR), Leh providing information on the Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) in promotion of Sustainable Eco-Tourism in Ladakh. He introduced the participants to the ancient medicinal system of Sowa-Rigpa, popularly known as the Amchi or Tibetan system of medicine. He focussed on the sustainable use of the numerous plants used in the Amchi system and displayed pictorial snapshots of the important plants used in the traditional system.



Padma Gurmit



Pankaj Chandan

Dr. Pankaj Chandan, Sr. Nature Conservation Scientist at Himalayan Foundation for Conservation Leadership, Jammu delivered an insightful talk on “Black-necked Crane as an Indicator of Ecosystem Health in Ladakh”. He provided a detailed overview of high-altitude wetlands in India, China, and Bhutan, highlighting their significance as key habitats for the Black-necked Crane. Dr. Chandan stressed that the successful breeding of the Black-necked Crane in any high-altitude wetland indicates that the wetland is in good health. This success serves as evidence that the wetland meets all the criteria necessary for the cranes' breeding requirements, thereby reflecting a well-functioning and balanced ecosystem. He threw light on various issues being faced by Black-necked Cranes and its key habitat across the Himalaya. He highlighted that the understanding of the Black-necked Crane as an indicator species underscores the importance of conserving high-altitude wetlands, not only for the cranes but for the broader biodiversity and ecosystem services they support. Dr. Chandan's lecture reinforced the need for focused conservation efforts in these sensitive regions to maintain their ecological integrity.



Sh. Jigmet Takpa, former Chief Wildlife Warden of UT Ladakh, was the Chief Guest at the Valedictory. He gave a candid talk on the ‘Potential and opportunities of developing eco-tourism in Ladakh’, which was much appreciated by the participants. He threw light on the success of the Homestay’s programme in the protected areas (PAs), especially within the Hemis High Altitude National Park. He informed that there has been a steep rise of wildlife tourism in Ladakh, and now tourists visit the area even during the harsh winters, spending hefty amounts to have a sighting of the elusive snow leopard in the wild. This economic boom for the communities has resulted in the better protection of the

wildlife in their areas.

Later, Sh. Takpa distributed the mementos and certificates to the participants, and many among them were overwhelmed at receiving the certificates from him. Director ICFRE-HFRI Dr. Sandeep Sharma assisted during the felicitations and certificate distribution.



Felicitations and Certificate Distribution

At the end, the Training Coordinator Dr. Jishtu provided the customary vote of thanks and highlighted the whole hearted cooperation of the participants during the entire training. The training was well covered by the local print media as well as local television channels.

Acknowledgement: Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India for funding the workshop and DIHAR for the venue.

Given below are some comments received from the participants:

- *Thanks Dr Vaneet and HFRI Team for organising such a wonderful training cum memorable visit to Leh and around.*

Sanjay Shrivastava IFS, UP/1989 Batch
PCCF (Wildlife),
Uttar Pradesh Forest Department



- *Thank you, Dr Vaneet and your team, for the wonderful organisation of the workshop.*

Diksha Kumari Prasad IFS JHK/1991 Batch
Additional PCCF (Training) Ranchi, Jharkhand



- *Thank you so much to the whole team who conducted this training module. We learnt a few new things under the banner of Ecosystem Health Card, interacted well with resource persons, seniors and friends and visited wonderful sites as well. Excellent arrangements were made for accommodation and food with a very warm hospitality. Thank you so much for everything.*

Dilraj Prabhakar IFS CHH/2008 Batch
O/O PCCF & HoFF, Chhatisgarh

- *Thank you Dr. Jishtu and team, you made our visit to Ladak memorable.*

Sh. Sidramappa M.C., IFS NG/2007



- *I would like to thank Dr Vaneet Jishtu and his team for organising the three-day workshop wonderfully.*

S. R. Natesha, IFS JHK/2003 Batch
O/o PCCF and HoFF, Jharkhand

“We didn’t realize we were making memories; we just knew we were having fun.”

– Winnie the Pooh