

**BEOFRE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 555 of 2024**

IN THE MATTER OF: -

News item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024.

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BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 555 OF 2024

IN THE MATTER OF:-

NEWS ITEM TITLED "INDIA LOST 2.33 MILLION HECTARES OF TREE COVER SINCE 2000 GLOBAL FOREST WATCH" APPEARING IN THE EXPRESS DATE 13.04.2024.

ADDITIONAL AFFIDAVIT ON BEHALF OF THE STATE OF SIKKIM/RESPONDENT NO. 26 IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE ORDER DATED 29.10.2025 AND 29.01.2026.

I, Sunil Kumar, I.F.S., Additional Resident Commissioner, Government of Sikkim, Sikkim House, 12, Panchsheel Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi, do hereby solemnly affirm and most humbly and respectfully submit as under:

1. That I am authorized to swear the present affidavit on the instructions received from the State Government of Sikkim.
2. That I am the Additional Resident Commissioner of the State Government of Sikkim, and as such am competent to depose to the contents of this affidavit.
3. It is respectfully submitted that vide Orders dated 29.01.2025 and 09.05.2025, the Learned Tribunal directed all States/Union Territories to file their Responses and Status Reports containing complete particulars of forest cover, tree cover, and allied data for the period 2001–2021. Further, vide Order dated 29.10.2025, the Hon'ble Tribunal directed all States/Union Territories to submit their responses to the Amicus Report dated 11.09.2025.



Subsequently, vide Order dated 29.01.2026, further time was granted to the States/Union Territories to file their responses to the said Amicus Report.

4. It is further submitted that the State of Sikkim has already filed its Compliance Affidavit on 11.10.2025, placing on record the Status Reports of the Forest Survey for the years 2001, 2021, and 2023. It is submitted that the State of Sikkim has duly complied with the directions of this Hon'ble Court by placing on record complete information pertaining to forest cover, tree cover, and other related data for the period 2001 to 2021.
5. It is pertinent to note that the State of Sikkim, that the State of Sikkim is filing the present affidavit, to place on record the Response to the Amicus Report.
6. That with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus to achieve the forest cover expansions, the State of Sikkim respectfully submits that despite nearly 30% of its geographical area comprising perpetual snow and barren rocky terrain, the State of Sikkim has, over the decades, significantly increased its forest cover and has achieved and sustained an impressive forest cover of 47.33%, placing it among the leading States in the country in the sphere of ecological conservation.
7. It is submitted that the State of Sikkim administers approximately 5,841 sq. km of recorded forest area, constituting over 82% of its total geographical area, further complemented by a consistent increase in tree cover outside recorded forest lands, thereby reflecting a balanced and inclusive approach to landscape level greening.



8. That, this achievement has been driven by a dual strategy: structured afforestation within forest lands through mechanisms such as the State CAMPA and the Green India Mission, alongside community-led expansion of tree cover beyond forest areas. Innovative initiatives such as “Mero Rukh Mero Santati,” “Mero Bato Mero Bot,” and “Paryavaran Parva” have successfully integrated tree plantation with social, cultural, and livelihood frameworks, thereby ensuring sustainable and participatory environmental conservation.
9. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus regarding promotion of agroforestry, the State of Sikkim respectfully submits that it actively promotes agroforestry as an integral component of its organic and climate-resilient agricultural framework, by integrating trees with crops and livestock, including cardamom-based and horticulture-driven models, with the objective of enhancing farm income and biodiversity.
10. That the State of Sikkim further submits that a dedicated Social Forestry Circle under the Forest & Environment Department, Government of Sikkim, anchors the implementation of such policies through targeted schemes focusing on farm forestry, fodder security, and community-based plantations. These initiatives are further complemented by the Watershed Development Component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, which adopts a ridge-to-valley approach by integrating mixed tree plantations, horticulture development, and fodder species within production systems. Such measures, coupled with soil and moisture conservation (SMC) works, micro-irrigation support, and land treatment activities, facilitate the



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sustainable intensification of agroforestry systems, particularly in rainfed and fragile hill landscapes.

11. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the promotion of agroforestry, it is respectfully submitted that the State of Sikkim has already adopted and implemented a robust agroforestry framework as an integral component of its organic and climate-resilient agricultural system. The said framework envisages the integration of trees with crops and livestock, including cardamom-based and diversified horticultural models, with the objective of enhancing farmers' income, ecological sustainability, and biodiversity conservation.
12. It is further submitted that in the State of Sikkim, a dedicated Social Forestry Circle under the Forest & Environment Department is entrusted with anchoring policy implementation through targeted schemes focusing on farm forestry, fodder security, and community-based plantations. These initiatives are further strengthened by the Watershed Development Component under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), which adopts a ridge-to-valley approach by integrating mixed tree plantations, horticultural development, and fodder species within production systems. The said interventions, coupled with soil and moisture conservation measures (SMC), micro-irrigation support, and land treatment activities, facilitate the sustainable intensification of agroforestry systems, particularly in rainfed and ecologically fragile hill landscapes.



13. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Forest Fire

Management, it is respectfully submitted that the State of Sikkim has in place a comprehensive, technology-driven and community-based forest fire management framework. The State of Sikkim utilizes satellite-based alert systems, including inputs from FSI/ISRO, along with the Sikkim Wildfire Spread Forecasting & Monitoring System (SWFMS), for real-time early warning and fire spread prediction. A dedicated fire management policy is in force, emphasizing risk mapping, prevention, and preparedness strategies.

14. It is further submitted that key preventive and mitigation measures undertaken by the State include annual maintenance of fire lines, fuel load management, engagement of community fire watchers, and active involvement of Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs). The operational capacity of the State has been significantly strengthened under the Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FFPMS), inter alia, through the provision of modern firefighting equipment such as fire blowers, protective gear, and chainsaws to frontline personnel. In addition, robust inter-agency coordination with disaster management authorities, coupled with continuous awareness generation and capacity-building initiatives, further augments the efficiency and responsiveness of the State's forest fire management system.
15. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Forest Inventory and Monitoring, it is respectfully submitted that the State of Sikkim has progressed beyond conventional GIS-based approaches and has established a comprehensive geospatial governance framework for effective forest



management. It is further submitted that initiatives such as geo-referenced plantation mapping under programmes like “*Mero Rukh Mero Santati*” facilitate public-facing spatial tracking of plantations, thereby enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. The State has also introduced mobile-based digital platforms, including the Sikkim Forest Portal, to improve data accessibility, real-time reporting, and stakeholder interface, thereby strengthening governance and service delivery mechanisms. Additionally, periodic satellite-based assessments of forest canopy cover, degradation analysis, and impact evaluation of interventions are systematically integrated with field-level data, enabling adaptive management, informed decision-making, and timely course correction in forestry practices.

16. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Mangrove and Wetland Protection, it is respectfully submitted that the State of Sikkim does not possess mangrove ecosystems owing to its geographical and climatic conditions, it has, however, established a robust policy and institutional framework for the conservation and management of wetlands and riverine ecosystems. It is further submitted that high-altitude lakes such as Tsomgo, Gurudongmar, and Khecheopalri are protected under ecologically sensitive area management frameworks aligned with the principles of the Ramsar Convention, with Khecheopalri Lake having been designated as a Ramsar Site, thereby reaffirming the State's commitment to wetland conservation.

17. It is pertinent to note that in the State of Sikkim, a significant institutional mechanism in this regard is the formation of Pokhari Samrakshan Samitees (PSS), which enable



community-led protection, monitoring, and sustainable management of wetlands by integrating traditional ecological knowledge with formal governance. The Forest & Environment Department, Government of Sikkim undertakes, inter alia, catchment area treatment and eco-restoration of wetlands using native species, regulation of tourism and anthropogenic pressures around ecologically sensitive lakes, and biodiversity conservation along with habitat improvement within wetland ecosystems. In addition, the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), Sikkim, complements these efforts through regular monitoring of water quality in rivers and lakes, implementation of pollution abatement measures and environmental standards, and river conservation initiatives, including public awareness programmes, waste management interventions, and prevention of effluent discharge.

18. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Biodiversity and Forest Health, the State of Sikkim maintains a strong biodiversity governance framework supported by a Protected Area Network covering over 31% of its geographical area, the highest in the country, anchored by Khangchendzonga National Park.
19. That, in the State of Sikkim, the Sikkim State Biodiversity Board has institutionalized conservation through 196 Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and 196 People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs), documenting local bioresources and traditional knowledge. Additional initiatives include seed banks for indigenous crops, notification of biodiversity heritage sites (Tungkyoung Oho Lake), and value-chain development of medicinal plants,



Sumil

thereby strengthening both conservation and livelihoods. Further, these efforts are complemented by invasive species management, habitat conservation, and promotion of native mixed-species plantations, ensuring long-term forest health and ecosystem resilience. Additionally, the State of Sikkim emphasizes community-based conservation by integrating local stakeholders in biodiversity management, while aligning with national frameworks such as the Biological Diversity Act and climate adaptation strategies.

20. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Community Participation, the State of Sikkim has institutionalized community-led forest governance through Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), Eco-Development Committees (EDCs), Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs), and Watershed Development Committees (WDCs), ensuring local participation in the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of forest resources. These institutions are further strengthened by benefit-sharing mechanisms, eco-tourism initiatives, and Access & Benefit Sharing (ABS) provisions under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. Public participation is further promoted through campaigns such as *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, *Mero Bato Mero Bot*, and *My Child from Wild*. The State of Sikkim also ensures extensive outreach and capacity-building through multimedia campaigns, school programmes, and grassroots engagement, promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable practices.
21. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Urban



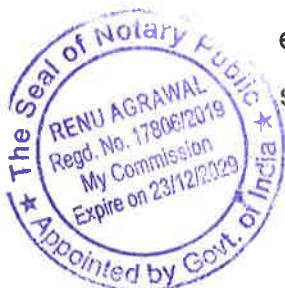
Forestry, the State of Sikkim has adopted an integrated urban greening approach, embedding forestry within urban planning and climate resilience strategies, with a focus on distributed green infrastructure rather than isolated plantations. Additionally, the key interventions include development of urban green belts, biodiversity parks, and eco-restoration of open spaces; avenue and roadside plantations using native and ornamental species to improve microclimate and aesthetics; and convergence with Smart City initiatives and State climate action plans for sustainable urban landscapes. These efforts are supported by collaboration between the Forest & Environment Department, Urban Development Department, and Urban Local Bodies, thereby creating a liveable, climate-resilient, and green urban ecosystem in the State of Sikkim. Further, with the installation of children's play facilities and open gym equipment, these Nagar Vans are designed to cater to the diverse recreational and fitness needs of residents in the vicinity, and have presently been established in all four districts of the State of Sikkim.

22. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Legal and Policy Measures, it is submitted that while revision of the National Forest Policy falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the State of Sikkim has established a strong State-level regulatory and enforcement framework to safeguard its forests and environment. The State of Sikkim ensures strict control over deforestation and encroachment, with illegal logging being extremely rare due to vigilant field presence and effective enforcement of forest laws. A well-structured forest administration, supported by regular monitoring and



community vigilance, has been critical in maintaining ecological integrity.

23. It is further submitted that the State of Sikkim is recognized for its progressive environmental policies, including a Statewide ban on plastic carry bags and regulation of plastic water bottles; notification of eco-sensitive zones and conservation areas to protect fragile ecosystems; integration of climate change priorities through the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) aligned with national and global commitments (SDGs); and strengthening of environmental compliance and pollution control mechanisms through regulatory bodies. Additionally, the State of Sikkim promotes convergence of environmental laws with development planning, ensuring that infrastructure and economic activities adhere to strict environmental safeguards.
24. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Education and Awareness, the State of Sikkim has institutionalized environmental education and awareness through sustained campaigns, capacity-building programmes, and observance of key events such as *Van Mahotsav*, *Wildlife Week*, *Watershed Mahotsav*, and *Paryavaran Parva*. Policy-led measures, including an early ban on single-use plastics, regulation of plastic water bottles, and citizen-centric initiatives like *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, *Mero Bato Mero Bot*, and *My Child from Wild*, have significantly strengthened public participation. Together with widespread adoption of organic practices and active community involvement, these efforts have fostered a strong culture of environmental stewardship and shared responsibility across the State. It is



further submitted that the State of Sikkim has repeatedly received national recognition from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as a Best Performing State in Environmental Education, thereby highlighting the effectiveness of its sustained outreach, capacity-building efforts, and large-scale behavioural change initiatives.

25. That, with respect to the recommendations and suggestions put forth by the Ld. Amicus Curiae regarding the Reclamation of Dumping Sites, the State of Sikkim undertakes systematic reclamation and eco-restoration of dumping and degraded sites in line with the provisions of the *Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980*. Diversion of forest land for infrastructure projects mandates site-specific restoration, stabilization of spoil dumps, and compensatory afforestation funded through CAMPA by user agencies.
26. It is pertinent to note that the State of Sikkim enforces scientific bioengineering measures, including slope stabilization, drainage management, and plantation of native species suited to fragile Himalayan conditions, particularly in landslide-prone and road construction areas. Strict monitoring ensures compliance with approved reclamation plans and facilitates long-term ecological recovery.
27. That, the State of Sikkim has further adopted and effectively operationalized the policy measures to enhance forest and tree cover in line with national priorities and environmental recommendations.



28. That, with regard to the Nagar Van Yojna (NVY), a scheme launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in 2020 to develop 200 urban forests across India. It is submitted that the State of Sikkim promotes the development of urban forests, green belts, and biodiversity parks within municipal and peri-urban areas in accordance with the said scheme. The above-mentioned interventions aim to improve ecological balance, enhance urban biodiversity, and increase tree cover in cities through convergence with local bodies and community participation. It is further submitted that, with the installation of children's play facilities and open gym equipment, Nagar Vans are designed to cater to the diverse recreational and fitness needs of residents living in the vicinity. Presently, Nagar Vans have been established in all four districts of the State of Sikkim.
29. That, with regard to the National Mission for a Green India (GIM), one of the eight missions under India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), launched in 2014, which aims to increase forest and tree cover, restore degraded ecosystems, and enhance ecosystem services including carbon sequestration, it is submitted that the State of Sikkim undertakes afforestation and eco-restoration of degraded forest landscapes under the said Mission. Further, the State of Sikkim focuses on increasing forest and tree cover, enhancing carbon sequestration, and improving ecosystem services, and the Mission is implemented through community-based approaches ensuring livelihood security and sustainability.
30. That, in accordance with the Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FFPM), the only centrally funded



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program dedicated to forest fire management in India, it is submitted that the State of Sikkim follows a technology-driven and community-based fire management approach, utilizing satellite-based alerts (FSI/ISRO) and the Sikkim Wildfire Spread Forecasting & Monitoring System (SWFMS) for early warning and fire spread prediction. The State of Sikkim has adopted preventive and mitigation strategies, including fire line creation, early warning systems, community engagement, and capacity building of frontline staff. These measures protect existing forest resources and support natural regeneration, thereby contributing to sustained forest cover.

31. That, in accordance with the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), an authority established to manage funds collected for compensatory afforestation when forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes, it is submitted that the State of Sikkim ensures strict implementation of compensatory afforestation as envisaged under the CAF Act, 2016 and CAF Rules, 2018, in cases of forest land diversion. Further, the funds under CAMPA are utilized for afforestation, regeneration, and conservation activities, ensuring no net loss of forest cover and maintaining ecological balance in the State of Sikkim. It is further submitted that, even amid continued developmental activities, the State of Sikkim has maintained forest cover above 47%, demonstrating the positive impact of CAMPA implementation and related environmental conservation measures.
32. That, in accordance with the “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” initiative, a green initiative that encourages individuals to plant a tree in honour of their mother and aims to strengthen



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emotional connection with nature while promoting environmental conservation and increasing green cover, it is submitted that the State of Sikkim encourages plantation drives under this initiative to increase public participation in tree planting. It is further submitted that, by linking environmental conservation with social and cultural values, the programme strengthens community ownership and contributes to expansion of green cover. The State of Sikkim has institutionalized plantation programmes through community initiatives such as *A Day for Mother Earth*, *Sikkim Paryavaran Parva*, *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, and *Mero Bato Mero Bot*.

33. That, in accordance with the Green Credit Initiative, an initiative to promote voluntary plantation activities through a dynamic land bank and digital platform for issuing Green Credits, it is submitted that the State of Sikkim promotes voluntary plantation and restoration of degraded lands and undertakes initiatives for Payment of Ecosystem Services. This policy encourages stakeholders to undertake climate-positive actions, thereby enhancing tree cover even outside recorded forest areas in the State of Sikkim.

A true copy of the Response to the Amicus Report submitted by the Forest and Environment Department, Government of Sikkim is annexed herewith and marked as **Annexure A-1** [**16** to **23**].


34. That the State of Sikkim remains committed to maintaining and further improving its forest cover through sustainable forest management, strict monitoring, and people-participatory initiatives to ensure the preservation of its natural heritage.



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35. That the present affidavit is true to the best of my knowledge and information received from the Answering Respondent and nothing material has been concealed therefrom.

Identified
Answering
07/03/2023
Identified the deponent who is signed in my presence

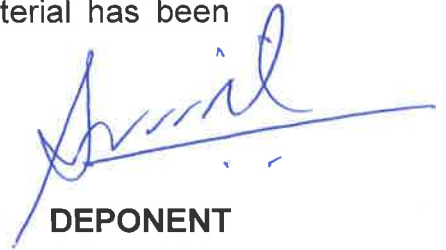


DEPONENT

SUNIL KUMAR, IFS
Additional Resident Commissioner
Government of Sikkim
Sikkim House, New Delhi

VERIFICATION:

Verified at New Delhi on 26 APR 2026 day of _____, 2026, that the contents of the above said affidavit are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Nothing material has been concealed therefrom.



DEPONENT

SUNIL KUMAR, IFS
Additional Resident Commissioner
Government of Sikkim
Sikkim House, New Delhi



ATTESTED

NOTARY PUBLIC
(INDIA)

26 APR 2026

Response of the state of Sikkim on the recommendation and suggestions to Increase Forest Cover with reference to Original Application No. 555/2024 (I.A. No. 207/2025, I.A. 144/2025,

News item titled "India Lost 2.33 million Hectare of tree cover since 2000, Global Forest Watch"

1. Forest Cover Expansion - *The target is to achieve the National Forest Policy (1988) goals of bringing 33% of India's geographical area under forest and tree cover nationally, and 66% in hilly areas. The aim is to enhance green cover, support rural livelihoods, and create carbon sinks.*

Response: Despite nearly 30% of its geographical area being under perpetual snow and barren rocky terrain, Sikkim has increased forest cover over decades and achieved & sustained an impressive forest cover of 47.33%, placing it among the leading states in the country in terms of ecological conservation. The State administers an extensive 5,841 sq. km of Recorded Forest Area (over 82% of its total geography), complemented by increased tree cover outside recorded forest areas, reflecting a balanced and inclusive approach to landscape-level greening.

This achievement is driven by a dual strategy: structured afforestation within forest lands through mechanisms such as State CAMPA, the Green India Mission etc., alongside community-led expansion of tree cover beyond forests. Innovative initiatives like *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, *Mero Bato Mero Bot*, *Paryavaran Parva* etc. have successfully embedded tree planting into social, cultural, and livelihood frameworks.

2. Agroforestry Promotion - *Agroforestry involves integrating trees with crops and livestock to improve soil productivity, increase farmer income, and enhance biodiversity. This reduces the dependence on natural forests for resources and contributes to carbon sequestration. It is recommended to strengthen agroforestry research and create a mass movement for its adoption.*

Response: Sikkim promotes agroforestry as part of its organic and climate-resilient farming system, integrating trees with crops and livestock, including cardamom-based and horticulture models to enhance income and biodiversity.

A dedicated Social Forestry Circle under the Forest & Environment Department anchors policy implementation through targeted schemes focused on farm forestry, fodder security, and community plantations. These interventions are complemented by the Watershed Development Component of PMKSY, which adopts a ridge-to-valley approach by integrating mixed tree plantations, horticulture development, and fodder species within production systems and soil and moisture conservation measures (SMC), micro-irrigation support, and land treatment activities, enables sustainable intensification of agroforestry systems in rainfed and fragile hill landscapes.

3. Forest Fire Management - *There is a need to adopt the National Programme on Forest Fire Management (NPFFM) as outlined in the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023. Recommended measures include the use of satellite-based systems for early warning and real-time monitoring, deploying artificial intelligence to predict high-risk zones, and integrating forest fire response into disaster management systems.*

Response: Sikkim follows a technology-driven and community-based fire management approach, using satellite-based alerts (FSI/ISRO) and the Sikkim Wildfire Spread Forecasting & Monitoring System (SWFMS) for early warning and fire spread prediction. The State has a dedicated fire management policy focusing on risk mapping and preventive strategies.

Key measures include annual fire line maintenance, fuel load management, community fire watchers, and JFMC involvement. Operational capacity has been significantly enhanced through the Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FFPMS), including distribution of modern firefighting equipment (fire blowers, protective gear, chainsaws, etc.) to frontline staff.

Strong inter-agency coordination with disaster management authorities and continuous awareness and capacity-building efforts further strengthen response systems.

4. Forest Inventory & Monitoring - *Accurate and timely forest data collection should be ensured through the adoption of modern technologies such as satellites, drones, GIS, and PDA-based mapping systems.*

Response: Sikkim has moved beyond conventional GIS use to establish a comprehensive geospatial governance framework for forestry.

Further, initiatives like geo-referenced plantation mapping under programs such as “Mero Rukh Mero Santati” enable public-facing spatial tracking of plantations, enhancing transparency and citizen engagement.

The State has also introduced mobile-based digital platforms (e.g., Sikkim Forest Portal) to improve data access, reporting, and stakeholder interface, strengthening governance and service delivery.

Additionally, periodic satellite-based canopy cover assessment, degradation analysis, and impact evaluation of interventions are systematically integrated with field data, enabling adaptive management and timely course correction.

5. Mangrove and Wetland Protection - *Mangrove ecosystems are carbon-dense, despite occupying less than 1% of tropical forest and sequestering approximately 3% of world's tropical forest carbon. Mangroves should be protected as part of India's obligations under the Ramsar*

Convention. The Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes (MISHTI) scheme should be expanded to promote shoreline afforestation and improve coastal livelihoods.

Response: While Sikkim does not have mangroves, it has established a strong policy and institutional framework for wetland and river conservation. High-altitude lakes such as Tsomgo, Gurudongmar, and Khecheopalri are protected under ecologically sensitive area management approaches aligned with Ramsar principles, with Khecheopalri Lake designated as a Ramsar Site, reaffirming the State's conservation commitment.

A key institutional innovation is the formation of Pokhari Samrakshan Samitees (PSS), enabling community-led protection, monitoring, and sustainable management of wetlands, integrating traditional knowledge with formal governance.

The Forest & Environment Department undertakes:

- Catchment area treatment and eco-restoration of wetlands using native species
- Regulation of tourism and anthropogenic pressures around critical lakes
- Biodiversity conservation and habitat improvement in wetland ecosystems

The State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), Sikkim complements these efforts through:

- Regular water quality monitoring of rivers and lakes
- Implementation of pollution abatement measures and environmental standards
- River conservation initiatives, including awareness, waste management interventions, and prevention of effluent discharge

6. Biodiversity and Forest Health - *Regular monitoring of forest health is essential, including surveillance of invasive species, soil conditions, and disturbances such as overgrazing and illicit felling. Forests with mixed-size tree classes should be encouraged as they offer better resilience to climate change.*

Response: Sikkim maintains a strong biodiversity governance framework supported by a Protected Area Network covering over 31% of its geographical area—the highest in the country, anchored by Khangchendzonga National Park.

The Sikkim State Biodiversity Board has institutionalized conservation through 196 Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and 196 People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) documenting local bioresources and traditional knowledge. Additional initiatives include seed banks for indigenous crops, biodiversity heritage site notification (Tungkyoung Dho Lake), and value-chain development of medicinal plants, strengthening both conservation and livelihoods.

These efforts are complemented by invasive species management, habitat conservation, and promotion of native mixed-species plantations, ensuring long-term forest health and ecosystem resilience.

Additionally, Sikkim emphasizes community-based conservation, integrating local stakeholders in biodiversity management, while aligning with national frameworks such as the Biological Diversity Act and climate adaptation strategies.

7. Community Participation - *Local communities should be incentivized through Joint Forest Management (JFM), eco-tourism opportunities, and inclusion in carbon credit mechanisms to ensure active participation in forest conservation efforts.*

Response: Sikkim has institutionalized community-led forest governance through Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), Eco-Development Committees (EDCs), Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs), Watershed Development Committees (WDCs) ensuring local participation in protection, restoration, and sustainable use of forest resources. These institutions are further strengthened by benefit-sharing mechanisms, eco-tourism initiatives, and Access & Benefit Sharing (ABS) provisions under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. Public participation is further driven by campaigns like *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, *Mero Bato Mero Bot*, and *My Child from Wild*. The State also ensures extensive outreach and capacity building through multimedia campaigns, school programmes, and grassroots engagement, promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable practices.

8. Urban Forestry - *Urban areas should be required to include green belts in planning. Additionally, rooftop forestry and citizen-led afforestation should be promoted to help tackle urban challenges such as air pollution and rising temperatures.*

Response: Sikkim has adopted an integrated urban greening approach, embedding forestry within urban planning and climate resilience strategies. The focus is on distributed green infrastructure rather than isolated plantations.

Key interventions include:

- Development of urban green belts, biodiversity parks, and eco-restoration of open spaces
- Avenue and roadside plantations using native and ornamental species to improve microclimate and aesthetics
- Convergence with Smart City initiatives and State climate action plans for sustainable urban landscapes

These efforts are supported by collaboration between the Forest & Environment Department, Urban Development Department, and Urban Local Bodies, creating a liveable, climate-resilient, and green urban ecosystem in Sikkim. With the installation of childrens' play facilities and open gym equipment, these Nagar Vans are designed to cater to the diverse recreational and fitness needs of residents living in the vicinity. Currently, Nagar Vans have been established in all four districts of Sikkim

9. Legal and Policy Measures - The National Forest Policy (1988) should be revised to reflect modern environmental challenges such as climate change, carbon trading, and the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Laws related to illegal logging and forest encroachments need to be tightened and better enforced.

Response: While revision of the National Forest Policy falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Sikkim has established a strong state-level regulatory and enforcement framework to safeguard its forests and environment.

The State ensures strict control over deforestation and encroachment, with illegal logging being extremely rare due to vigilant field presence and effective enforcement of forest laws. A well-structured forest administration, supported by regular monitoring and community vigilance, has been critical in maintaining ecological integrity.

Sikkim is also recognized for its progressive environmental policies, including:

- A statewide ban on plastic carry bags and regulation of plastic water bottles.
- Notification of eco-sensitive zones and conservation areas to protect fragile ecosystems
- Integration of climate change priorities through the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) aligned with national and global commitments (SDGs)
- Strengthening of environmental compliance and pollution control mechanisms through regulatory bodies

Additionally, the State promotes convergence of environmental laws with development planning, ensuring that infrastructure and economic activities adhere to strict environmental safeguards.

10. Education and Awareness - Forest conservation should be integrated into school curricula. Training programs should be conducted for local governance bodies, and large-scale awareness campaigns should be launched to build a culture of environmental stewardship.

Response:

- Sikkim has institutionalized environmental education and awareness through sustained campaigns, capacity-building programmes, and observance of key events such as Van Mahotsav, Wildlife Week, Watershed Mahotsav, and Paryavaran Parva. Policy-led measures—including an early ban on single-use plastics, regulation of plastic water bottles, and citizen-centric initiatives like *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, *Mero Bato Mero Bot*, and *My Child from Wild*—have significantly strengthened public participation. Together with widespread adoption of organic practices and active community involvement, these efforts have fostered a strong culture of environmental stewardship and shared responsibility across the State.
- The State has received repeatedly national recognition from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as a Best Performing State in Environmental Education,

highlighting the effectiveness of its sustained outreach, capacity-building efforts, and large-scale behaviour change initiatives.

11. Transmission Line Management - Dwarf species preferably medicinal plants are plants within the right of way of transmission lines to mitigate environmental impact.

Response:

- Sikkim ensures ecologically sensitive management of transmission corridors by minimizing forest disturbance through careful alignment, mitigation measures, and plantation of low-height native species (dwarf vegetation) to maintain vegetation cover without affecting infrastructure safety.
- In accordance with the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, diversion of forest land for such projects mandates compensatory afforestation and transfer of funds by user agencies to CAMPA for plantation, maintenance, and ecological restoration. The State strictly enforces these provisions, ensuring timely compliance, site-specific afforestation, and effective field-level monitoring.

12. Reclamation of Dumping Sites - Native species are planted on dumping sites as per approved reclamation sites.

Response:

- Sikkim undertakes systematic reclamation and eco-restoration of dumping and degraded sites in line with the provisions of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980. Diversion of forest land for infrastructure projects mandates site-specific restoration, stabilization of spoil dumps, and compensatory afforestation funded through CAMPA by user agencies.
- The State enforces scientific bioengineering measures, including slope stabilization, drainage management, and plantation of native species suited to fragile Himalayan conditions, particularly in landslide-prone and road construction areas. Strict monitoring ensures compliance with approved reclamation plans and long-term ecological recovery.

POLICY MEASURES

The State of Sikkim has adopted and effectively operationalized the following policy measures to enhance forest and tree cover in line with national priorities and environmental recommendations:

1. Nagar Van Yojna (NVY) - Scheme launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in 2020 to develop 200 urban forests across India. It aims to create green spaces in cities for ecological balance, biodiversity conservation, and improved quality of life. These urban forests are developed on degraded or unused land in collaboration with local bodies and communities.

Response: The State promotes development of urban forests, green belts, and biodiversity parks within municipal and peri-urban areas. These interventions aim to improve ecological balance, enhance urban biodiversity, and increase tree cover in cities through convergence with local bodies and community participation. With the installation of childrens' play facilities and open gym equipment, Nagar Vans are designed to cater to the diverse recreational and fitness needs of residents living in the vicinity. Currently, Nagar Vans have been established in all four districts of Sikkim.

2. National Mission for a Green India (GIM) - It is one of the eight missions under India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), launched in 2014. It aims to increase forest and tree cover, restore degraded ecosystems, and enhance ecosystem services including carbon sequestration. The mission emphasizes community participation and focuses on both environmental sustainability and livelihood security.

Response: Sikkim undertakes afforestation and eco-restoration of degraded forest landscapes under the Green India Mission, with a focus on increasing forest and tree cover, enhancing carbon sequestration, and improving ecosystem services. The mission is implemented through community-based approaches ensuring livelihood security and sustainability.

3. Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM) - It is the only centrally funded program dedicated to forest fire management in India. It aims to reduce vulnerability of forests to fires through activities like fire line creation, use of fire-watch towers, and early warning systems. The scheme also supports capacity building, community involvement, and modern firefighting equipment for effective fire control.

Response: Sikkim follows a technology-driven and community-based fire management approach, using satellite-based alerts (FSI/ISRO) and the Sikkim Wildfire Spread Forecasting & Monitoring System (SWFMS) for early warning and fire spread prediction. The State adopts preventive and mitigation strategies including fire line creation, early warning systems, community engagement,

and capacity building of frontline staff. These measures protect existing forest resources and support natural regeneration, thereby contributing to sustained forest cover.

4. Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) - It was established to manage funds collected for compensatory afforestation when forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes. The authority ensures that afforestation, regeneration, and conservation activities are carried out using these funds. CAMPA operates at both national and state levels to promote sustainable forest management and ecological balance.

Response: Sikkim ensures strict implementation of compensatory afforestation as envisioned under CAF Act 2016 and CAF Rule 2018, in cases of forest land diversion. Funds under CAMPA are utilized for afforestation, regeneration, and conservation activities, ensuring no net loss of forest cover and maintaining ecological balance. Even amid continued developmental activities, the state has maintained forest cover above 47%, demonstrating the positive impact of CAMPA implementation and related environmental conservation measures. In the state.

5. "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" - It is a green initiative that encourages individuals to plant a tree in honor of their mother. The campaign aims to strengthen emotional bonds while promoting environmental conservation and increasing green cover. It is symbolic of nurturing nature as we honor the nurturing role of mothers.

Response: The State encourages plantation drives under this initiative to increase public participation in tree planting. By linking environmental conservation with social and cultural values, the programme strengthens community ownership and contributes to expansion of green cover. State has institutionalized plantation programme through community initiatives like *A Day for Mother Earth*, *Sikkim Paryavaran Parva*, *Mero Rukh Mero Santati*, *Mero Bato Mero Bot* etc.

6. Green Credit Initiative - It promotes voluntary plantation activities through a dynamic land bank and digital platform for issuing Green Credits. It incentivizes individuals and organizations to plant trees on degraded lands registered by Forest Departments. The goal is to enhance forest cover, restore degraded land, and encourage climate-positive actions.

Response: Sikkim promotes voluntary plantation and restoration of degraded lands and take initiatives for Payment of Eco-System Services. This policy encourages all to undertake climate-positive actions, thereby enhancing tree cover even outside recorded forest areas.



Office of Sameer Abhyankar <contactadvsa@gmail.com>

Re: Advance Service ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 555 of 2024 News item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024

1 message

Office of Sameer Abhyankar <contactadvsa@gmail.com>
To: Shivani Pawar <shivanipawar881@gmail.com>
Cc: yachna.sharma@innovatuslaw.in

Mon, Apr 27, 2026 at 11:16 AM

Dear Sir

Please find attached a scanned Copy of Additional Affidavit on behalf of the State of Sikkim/Respondent No. 26 In Compliance with the Order dated 29.01.2025 and 29.01.2026 in the captioned Matter.

Regards
Prince Kumar
For
Mr. Sameer Abhyankar
Standing counsel State of Sikkim.

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 **Additional Affidavit State of Sikkim.pdf**
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