

DEFORESTATION ISSUE



■ Villagers justify the encroachment saying they need more land due to expanding families. NIVEDITA KHANDEKAR/ HT

FROM GREEN FORESTS  
TO EXPANDING FARMS

**7** cases reported in last 2 years in Turung reserve

**11 hectares** encroached upon by people for farming

**163.9 sq km** area of Turung Forest reserve

**11,402 sq km** total area of Lohit district

**1,995 sq km** is very dense forest cover

**4,224 sq km** is moderately dense

**1,615 sq km** is open forest

# Despite forest act, trees of Arunachal face the cut



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**WAKRO (DISTRICT LOHIT):** Even after 2006, when the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was passed, the reserved forest in Wakro circle of this easternmost district of Arunachal Pradesh has seen regular encroachment and felling of trees for agriculture.

The practice — prevalent since 2005-06 — has seen an unprecedented increase in the last two years. Acres of forest area, reserve forest or land under sanctuary are regularly encroached upon and used for agriculture.

The Mishmi people here claim they need more land in view of expanding families, fuel wood, cash income from non-timber products and fodder for livestock. "But the population figures hardly corroborate the claims about expanding families. There are very few cases of genuine need. Most encroachments on reserve forest land are by private individualists with vested interests," said Gofailum Kri, a social activist from the area.

Explaining the procedure, T Pertin, DFO Tezu, said, "Families, who have encroached after the cut-off date will be evicted."

The cut-off date was December 13, 2005, when the FRA became applicable.

The first step in the direction is an offence report by the beat forester, which if verified, goes to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of the district, who has all the land records.

However, the poor track record of complaints and subsequent cases indicates poor governance. Pertin admitted, "That is because there are many black sheep in the department."

A case in point is the Turung forest reserve between the Namsai and Wakro circles, which has seen large-scale encroachment in recent times. Spread over 163.9 sq km, the reserve is part of a large contiguous forest in the region

(almost 3,000 sq km) that includes the nearby the Namdapha national park.

More than 50% of the reserved forest area is being used for farming. Kri claimed he has been advocating that even if people encroach reserve forestland, trees should not be cut.

But, according to the data obtained from the office of the DFO Namsai, only seven cases were reported in last two years in the Turung forest reserve while the area encroached upon is approximately 11 hectares. "There is no record of encroachment since 2006," an official said.

Besides, there are technical problems that remain unaddressed. After the FRA was enacted, there have been cases of both legal and illegal occupants felling forest trees for agriculture.

"But as the reserve forest has not been demarcated properly so there is no exact record. However, there is no doubt that the area under cultivation has gone up manifold."

Under the FRA, the tribals get ownership of the land that they have occupied traditionally. But encroachers here have misused this clause.

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Proposals under the FRA are already submitted. A committee too is formed to deal with those (encroachers).... hope something is done soon.

A PARON  
DFO Namsai