

India

Healthy forests, healthy people, healthy climate: An initiative for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the North Western Ghats News from the Field

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Applied Environmental Research Foundation

Conservation International

- * This project was carried out by the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), an Indian NGO

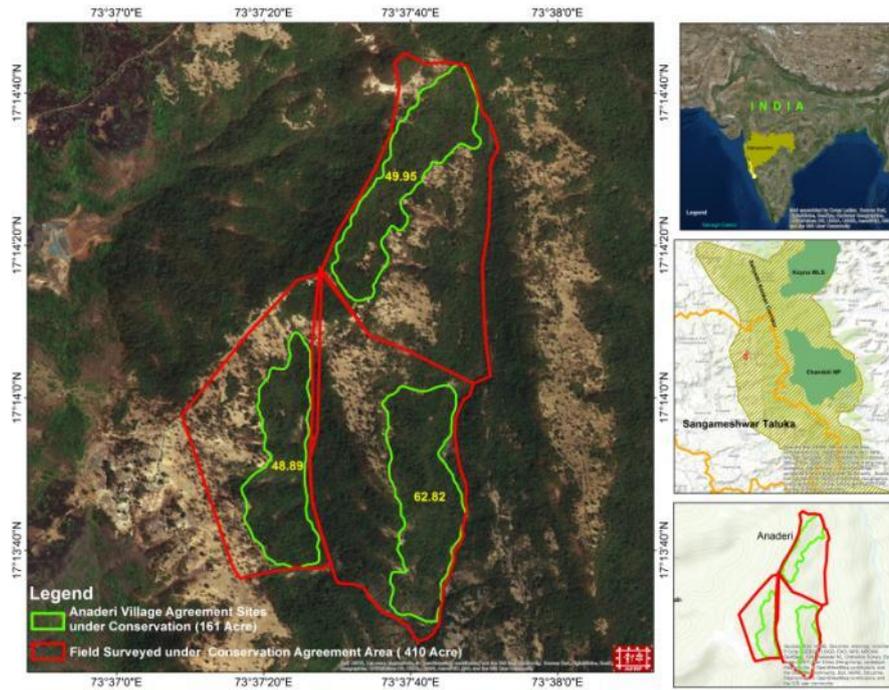
Conservation agreements

In the four villages of Lowale, Katavali, Anaderi, and Devghar in the Sangameshwar Taluka, the total size of the community forests covered by the 10-year conservation agreements have reached 282 acres (approx. 1.1 square kilometers). The conservation agreements have provided the 57 owners of these forests in the villages with both direct and indirect benefits. The forest boundaries have been drawn, and the area covered by the conservation agreements is now clearly defined.

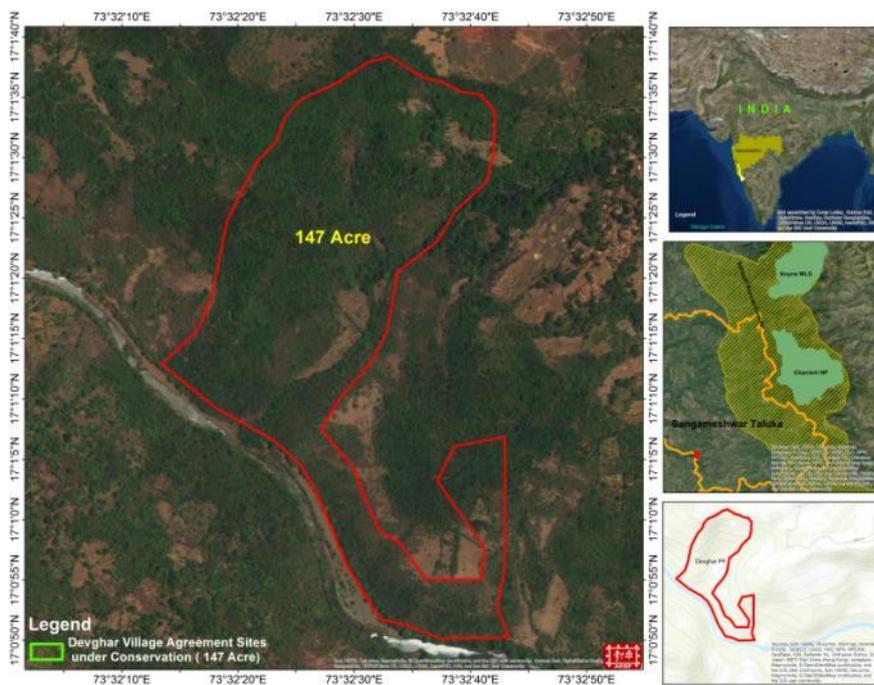


Forest owners in the villages of Anaderi and Devghar sign the conservation agreements

The two maps below show the boundaries of the forests.



Map showing the forests covered by the conservation agreement in Anaderi



Map showing the forests covered by the conservation agreement in Devghar

Restoration of sacred groves in Kulye village

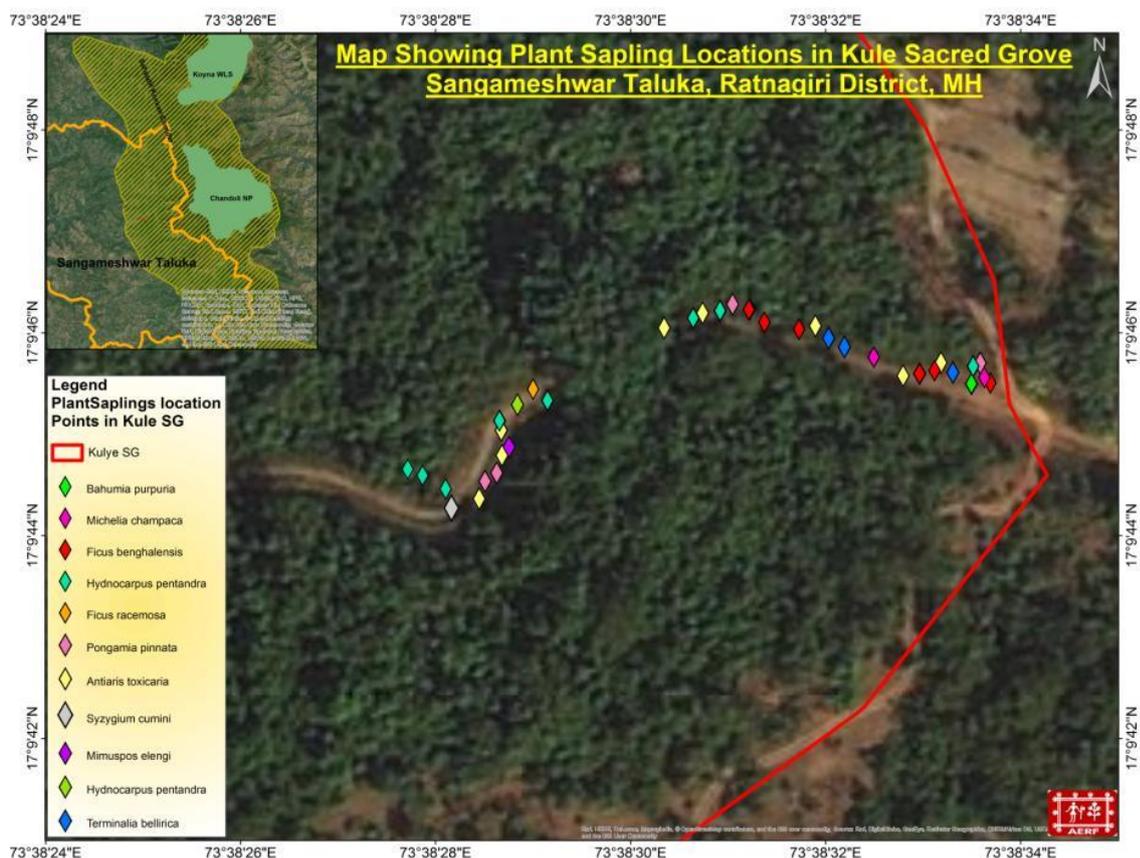
We began work on restoration of a sacred grove in Kulye village covering 25 acres (approx. 0.1 square kilometer). The sacred grove contains many types of trees whose protection is crucial since they provide a habitat for the hornbill and other wild animals. However, the sacred grove faces destruction due to activities such as the building of irrigation canals, cattle grazing, and logging. AERF holds meetings to discuss the importance of restoring the sacred grove with villagers, who have responded positively to our calls to action. In July, we planted 55 seedlings of indigenous species of trees. Enthusiastically joining community members in this tree-planting were students of The Earth Expedition India.



A large banyan tree (*Ficus amplisema*) in the sacred forest in Kulye village (left); a hornbill nesting site (circled in yellow) (right)



Working to restoring the forest in the sacred grove of Kulye village



Map with GPS-pinpointed locations of seedlings planted in the sacred grove of Kulye village

In addition to tree-planting activities, AERF conducted surveys to determine the health of the planted seedlings as well as the state of natural regeneration in land adjacent to the tree-planting site. The surveys showed that there are a total of 350 naturally growing seedlings in 26 varieties that have reached a height of at least five feet (approx. 1.5 meters). We have come to realize that conserving these endangered sacred groves is crucial to bringing back biodiversity.

Capacity building on role of forests producing healthy air

The improved cooking stoves that were provided under Daikin’s leadership have proved to be superb capacity-building tools for communities in the North Western Ghats that depend on the forests. Communities have learned that using wood depletes the forests and that incomplete combustion of the wood fuel causes air pollution.

In Pune, where the AERF headquarters is located, we ordered 200 cooking stoves from cooking stove makers. We also periodically check the stove makers’ progress to ensure that new products are delivered to communities in a timely manner. Fifty-five cooking stoves were shipped to the project site in Sangameshwar to be distributed to community members.

In the reporting period, we gave demonstrations of the improved cooking stoves in Simechi wadi in Ambavli village, Baing wadi near Bhowade, Karambale Dhawade wadi, Gelye wadi, Vashi village, Shelkewadi (Katavali village), Kokare wadi in Kulye village, and Chalake wadi in Sangameshwar. In Nive village, we received purchase orders for two cooking stoves at a discount. Furthermore, we gave demonstrations to promote the use of

the stoves for self-help groups in Devghar village, which have signed conservation agreements. As a result of these efforts, in the first week of October 15 households in Devghar village purchased the cooking stoves at a discount.



Improved cooking stove demonstrations in the villages of Katavali and Devghar

Raising seedlings in order to restore forests

The gathering of naturally sprouting seedlings is believed to be an effective way to grow rare indigenous tree species. AERF gathered a total of 869 seedlings in six species, including baheda (*Terminalia bellirica*) and jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), and raised these in AERF nursery beds in Kosumb village. These seedlings will be planted in the project area of the forest next season.

Follow-up meeting aimed at expanding approaches to conservation agreements

To facilitate decision-making with regards to conservation agreements, we held follow-up meetings with local communities and leaders in 11 villages: Devale Chinchwalkarwadi, Wadi Adhishti, Palu, Khadi Kolwan, Kumbhar khani, Nive budruk, Ojhare, Machal, Kosumb, Bamnoli, and Karjuve.

Based on information on forest areas provided by local communities for the conservation agreements, AERF promptly carried out rapid assessments of these forests. As a result, forest locations were clarified and understanding was reached on the value of conserving the forests. The brief survey reports on biodiversity in the villages of Khadi Kolwan and Karjuve provided partial information on the richness of biodiversity in privately owned forests in North Western Ghats. We believe that communities in many of these villages will sign conservation agreements in the next reporting period. About 300 acres (approx. 1.2 square kilometers) of forest is under consideration for conservation agreements in these villages.

Fairwood certification

On October 5, AERF received Fairwood certification for the third consecutive year. This certification signifies a high rating for AERF in terms of sustainable gathering of non-timber forest products, as well as in terms of transparency in the process of collecting the products and earning income from their sale. Nature Connect, the private company that established AERF, is the only company in all of South Asia to receive Fairwood certification.



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