China, the world’s most populous country, appears to have turned the corner on deforestation as fresh data showed that the Asian manufacturing hub and financial major scored a net gain in tree cover between 2000 and 2010. China has witnessed a lot in terms of industrial and infrastructure development but the country had to pay in terms of environment. The new data suggests that forest cover in China has increased. Forests are important for environment and ecology and declining forest cover has been blamed for environment issue and change in weather patterns.

Following decades of logging and clear cutting trees across the nation, the Chinese government implemented an extensive forest conservation program in year 1998. The data suggests that the program has offered amazing recovery for forest cover in some regions in China.

Chinese scientists studied the country’s forests with the help of satellite images to find out any increase or decrease in forest cover. They found that the country saw an increase of around 1.6 per cent of territory gained by forests, while 0.38 per cent regions lost tree cover.

Study author Andrés Viña of MSU’s Center for Systems Integration & Sustainability, said, “Before there was widespread deforestation. Now that has stopped and there is a net gain in forest cover.”

As trees grow by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere and locking the gas away in their various parts like roots, limbs and leaves, they play a crucial role in preventing elevation of CO2 levels in the atmosphere. Thus, trees
are a natural tool in mitigating climate change. The findings were detailed in a research paper published in the most recent edition of journal Science Advances.

A report published in the EurAsiaReview said, "The vast destruction of China’s forests, leveled after decades of logging, floods and conversion to farmland, has become a story of recovery, according to the first independent verification published in today’s Science Advances by Michigan State University (MSU) researchers."

“It is encouraging that China’s forest has been recovering in the midst of its daunting environmental challenges such as severe air pollution and water shortages,” said co-author Jianguo “Jack” Liu, Rachel Carson Chair in Sustainability and director of MSU’s Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability (CSIS). “In today’s telecoupled world, China is increasingly connected with other countries both socioeconomically and environmentally. Every victory must be measured holistically, or we aren’t getting a true picture.”

"Forests are crucial to ensuring soil and water conservation and climate regulation. The fate of forests in the world’s most populous nation has global consequences by virtue of the country’s sheer magnitude and its rapid development,” according to a news report published by EurekAlert.

"Our results are very positive for China," said author Andrés Viña of MSU-CSIS. "If you look at China in isolation, its program is working effectively and contributing to carbon sequestration in accordance to its agenda for climate change mitigation. But on the other hand, China is not in a vacuum."

In a report published by the HNGN News, "Forests are extremely important for their biodiversity and ability to prevent erosion. However, one of their most beneficial abilities is acting as a carbon sink to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Elevated carbon dioxide levels are currently warming our planet, and forests are key to preventing this detrimental aspect of climate change."

"The exporting countries are suffering from deforestation," Liu added. "A large proportion of the wood products imported to China have been used to make furniture for developed countries such as the USA and those in Europe."
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