PRINT: ISSN 0970-9274 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6608
JOURNAL OF HUMAN ECOLOGY
International Interdisciplinary Journal of Man-Environment Relationship

Full text open access online (Since 1990)

PRINT: ISSN 0970-9274 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6322
J Hum Ecol, 84(1-4): 1-12 (2023)
DOI: 10.31901/24566608.2023/84.1-3.3358

Identifying Forest Potential Areas in the Western Himalayan Region of the Chamba District (India)

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KEYWORDS Analytical Hierarchy Process. Biophysical Attributes. Forest Landscape. Remote Sensing and GIS. Geo-Spatial Analysis

ABSTRACT This study aims to identify potential areas for forest development and explore the biophysical characteristics of the existing forest landscape in the Chamba district of the Western Himalayas. It adopts a descriptive-cum-model-making research approach, integrating geospatial analysis and modelling techniques to evaluate forest potential based on ecological factors like soil type, topography, and vegetation cover. The results reveal three major high-potential areas for forest development and two low-potential zones. Certain forest ranges, such as Masrund and Bhalei, exhibit high potential, while Sandi and Ajog have low potential. The study identifies very high potential areas suitable for various plant communities and finds that *Pinus roxburghii*, *Cedrus deodara* and *Quercus leucotrichophora* thrive in high and moderate potential areas. These findings underscore the significance of strategic forest management practices for sustainable forest development and can guide policymakers and stakeholders in devising targeted conservation and afforestation strategies.