

SOME THOUGHTS ON FUTURE OF OTHER STATE FORESTS IN SRI LANKA

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The agricultural frontier in the country has been expanding in recent years, primarily through the alienation and leasing out of large extents of forested state land to landless persons and also through encroachments. The remaining unutilized state lands also carry forests, and the demand for agricultural land in the future will have to be met by selecting from these areas, lands that are best suited for agricultural development.

State land available for agriculture and other development purposes are currently designated as Other State Forests (OSF). A part of the OSF is under the jurisdiction of the Conservator of Forests and a part under the Divisional Secretaries. Much of this land in the Wet Zone has either been distributed or encroached upon and hence the bulk of the OSF is to be found in the Dry and Intermediate Zones. The forest cover on these lands have been denuded because of widespread chena cultivation and therefore what remains today is sparse forest.

As population increases, the demand for land from various users will increase and this demand will have to be met by the OSF. It is therefore very essential that all of the OSF in the country are evaluated and divided into different land use categories. Initially, lands suitable for forestry should be separated and devoted exclusively to forestry development. The balance area will represent the lands available for other uses.

The paper is in two parts. Part I will examine the need for categorising OSF. Part II will presents a methodology for categorising these lands based on 2 case studies undertaken in the Anuradhapura and Ratnapura districts.