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Status of Mangroves and Conservation Requirements in Sarasalai, Jaffna Peninsula

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Abstract

Mangroves are unique and highly productive ecosystems distributed along the intertidal coastlines and riverbanks. They play an important role by providing the link between marine and terrestrial ecosystems. This ecosystem provides several benefits to humans. Mangroves are traditionally used as timber, food, fuel, poles and fish traps. They serve as a source of tannin which is economically important. Sarasalai in the Jaffna peninsula is a vast area of a mangrove ecosystem. It serves as a study area during field trips for students. Research students also visit this area frequently to collect data. Recently the Sarasalai area has been facing various threats, including sand mining, garbage disposal, habitat destruction due to the construction of roads, communication towers etc. The construction activities have fragmented the habitat and blocked the natural lagoon water flow. This is a major danger faced by the completely natural mangrove ecosystem. In spite of its importance as a vital ecosystem and ecotourism spot, the area's natural biodiversity is at risk due to these anthropogenic activities. Cutting of mangroves and hunting also pose a serious threat to the mangrove vegetation at Sarasalai. Effective conservation measures are not taken continuously by the relevant authorities. Recent studies stress the need for coordinated conservation efforts, better management strategies and increased community participation. The local people who are living close by should be made aware of the danger of over exploitation of mangroves. There is an urgent requirement for collaboration between the relevant government officers and agencies to work towards an action plan to conserve this ecosystem.

Keywords: *Mangroves, Ecosystem, Conservation*