

What are Biological Diversity Heritage Sites?

Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS) are areas that are unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems having rich biodiversity comprising of any one or more of the components such as; species richness, high endemism, presence of rare, endemic and threatened species, keystone species, species of evolutionary significance, wild ancestors of domestic/cultivated species or land races or their varieties, past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds and having cultural or aesthetic values.

Importance of Biological Diversity Heritage Sites:

Biodiversity is closely linked to ecological security. Loss of biodiversity and bio-resources show an increasing trend mainly due to human activities. Therefore, it is necessary to instil and nurture conservation ethics in the community. Fortunately, the local communities in Meghalaya have been traditionally displaying a remarkable degree of conservation ethics and values in the sphere of natural resources management. Declaration of Biodiversity Heritage Sites is a welcome step which will exhibit the conservation ethics and values practiced by these societies to the wider world. Such declaration will help them renew their commitment to conservation besides acting as a model for other communities to follow. This is a small but important step that a community can take towards protecting the environment and ensuring sustainability of bio-resources across generations. BHS declaration marks the voluntary participation of communities in protection and conservation of biodiversity which helps in expanding the reach of conservation.

Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act:

As per this section, the State Governments are empowered to notify in the official gazette, in consultation with 'local bodies', areas of biodiversity importance as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

Under sub section (2) of Section 37 of the BD Act, the State Government in consultation with the Central Government may frame rules for the management and conservation of BHS.

Under sub section (3) of Section 37 of the BD Act, the State Governments are empowered to frame schemes for compensating or rehabilitating any person or section of people economically affected by such notification.

Criteria for Identification of BHS:

Areas having any of the following characteristics, may qualify for inclusion as BHS.

- Areas that contain a mosaic of natural, semi-natural, and manmade habitats, which together contain a significant diversity of life forms.
- Areas that contain significant domesticated biodiversity component and/or representative agro-ecosystems with on-going agricultural practices that sustain this diversity.
- Areas that are significant from a biodiversity point of view as also important cultural spaces such as sacred groves/trees and sites, or other large community conserved areas.
- Areas including very small ones that offer refuge or corridors for threatened and endemic fauna and flora, such as community conserved areas or urban greens and wetlands.
- Areas that provide habitats, aquatic or terrestrial, for seasonal migrant species for feeding and breeding.
- Areas that are maintained as preservation plots by the research wing of Forest department.
- Medicinal Plant Conservation Areas.

Identification and Declaration of BHS:

State Biodiversity Boards (SBB) may invite suggestion (or consider those already coming from communities) for declaration of BHSSs, through the Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and other relevant community institutions.



BHS in Meghalaya:

Meghalaya has many potential sites which can be declared as BHS. The Sacred Groves and the other types of community declared reserves are eminent candidate sites. There are many other areas which are rich in biodiversity, (aquatic/terrestrial) serving as habitats for rare/threatened species of flora and fauna. The living root bridges found in various parts of the state are living examples of remarkable bio-engineering that showcases the rich indigenous traditional knowledge wealth of the local communities. These root bridges may be declared as Biodiversity Heritage Sites. The sites where certain traditional crop varieties are conserved may also be declared as BHS.

An Appeal:

Meghalaya Biodiversity Board appeals to the local communities of Meghalaya for declaring suitable biodiversity rich areas under their control as BHS.

Declaration of BHS does not change the land ownership. It brings in deserving recognition to the conservation ethics and efforts of local communities. BHS tag ensures immediate recognition and attraction at the national as well as international level. It helps bringing in the much needed finances for conservation and associated community development.

By declaring an area as BHS, the communities set voluntary standards for conservation of biodiversity and for management of the bio resources therein, ensuring fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

People in Meghalaya are welcome to form Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) in their villages and propose constitution of BHS through these BMCs. The Meghalaya Biodiversity Board will be pleased to assist them.

Biodiversity Heritage Sites



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