



GOVERNMENT OF PUDUCHERRY
PUDUCHERRY POLLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE
Coastal Sand Dunes in Puducherry

ENVIS HUB NEWSLETTER



ENVIS HUB CENTRE PUDUCHERRY
Status of Environment & Related Issues in Puducherry

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Introduction :

India's coasts are special. All along its coastal length people live in large numbers. Nearly 250 million people live within 50 km from the coast. People live here even though the coast is sometimes not a very easy place to live in. Over a number of cyclones hit the Bay of Bengal in the last 100 years! And many of these damage property that people own and even put their lives in danger.

The coastal area is an amazing neighborhood with very interesting features includes underwater building colonies (coral reefs), grassy parks growing underwater (seagrasses), trees with strange and visible respiratory roots (mangroves), shores of rocks, sandy stretches (sandy beaches) and hillocks of sand (sand dunes). All of these neighborhoods have life forms that live in them quietly form a sort of protective shield against any harm that waves, storms or cyclones may bring. Each one is called an “ecosystem” - a kind of neighborhood by itself. Not much is known about these ecosystems, or who lives in them, or why they are important.

This coastal ecosystem plays a vital role in the nation's economy by providing livelihoods for a majority of the coastal population. Despite their diversity of terrestrial and aquatic habitats, ecological landscapes along the coast remain rather poorly understood, but nevertheless under intense human pressures.

Coastal Regions in the U.T. of Puducherry :

The three enclaves of U.T. of Puducherry are located in coastal regions of Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. Puducherry and Karaikal are located in coastal regions of Bay of Bengal and Mahe region is situated on the estuary of the Mayyazhi river and Arabian Sea. Yanam region is located apart from the coastal areas. The four regions of the Union Territory have a coastline of 45 km with 675 of inshore waters, 1.347 hectares (3.33 acres) of inland water and 800 ha of brackish water.

Puducherry coastal region include Sand beaches, Sand dunes, Estuaries, Mangroves, Ports, Fishing harbours, Towns, Villages, Tourist Resorts, Prawn Culture sites, Private coconut, Casuarinas, Eucalyptus plantations etc. Sand beaches, Sand dunes, Estuaries Mangroves sustain unique ecosystem.

Karaikal is a good fishing centre with the following ten marine fishing villages spread along the coast. They are Mandabathur, Kalikuppam, Akkampettai, Kottucherrymedu, Kasakudymedu, in Karaikal municipal area, Kilinjalmedu, Karaikalmedu, in Tirumalairayam Patinam commune, Karaikalchery in Neravy commune, Keezhaiyur, Pattincacherry and North Vanjore. Well established Coastal sand beach and sand dunes are available in Karaikal.

Only a short length of sand beach is available in Mahe and is located in in the coast of Arabian Sea. This picturesque little area is bounded on the south-west by the Arabian Sea, on the north by river Ponniyar and on the other sides by a stretch of calcareous hills of medium height which are linked to the Ghats by a series of wooden hillocks. The district consists of 3 entities viz, Mahe town proper, the small enclave of Kallayi and of Naluthura.

Mahe is situated on the Malabar Coast. The coast line here lies between the richest fishing belt between Ponnani and Mangalore on the west coast.

While the fourth enclave Yanam is located in the north bank of Kodavary. This district lies on the spot where the Coringariver and Godavari river separate. It is more or less a flat land. The main fishing units are Gulrimpeta, Agraharam, Kothapeta, Mettakur, Kanakalapeta, Kursampeta, Padvarevupeta and Sangadirerupeta. The shoe dhony (canoe) is the commonest fishing crafts here. Padona is another kind of boat in use. The catches consist mainly of mullets, hilsa, prawns, cat fish etc.

The Elements that Shape our Shores :

Waves

Wind blowing over the sea-surface creates a friction and drags on the water below. When the wind action becomes strong, the drag increases and waves are formed. Some winds make waves hit the shore at an angle. These waves bring sand to the beaches. Waves play role in creation and destruction. Each passing wave moves the sand around changing the shape and slope of the beach. During storms and cyclones, waves smash on the beaches directly and tear away a large amount of sand and also other objects on the coast. Such waves cause large scale erosion on the beaches.



Action of waves and wind in the coastal beach

Winds

Winds are one of the most powerful and mysterious of nature's wonders. Winds cause waves; sailors use them to sail; we use them to fly kites and nowadays they are also used to generate electricity through wind turbines. It is responsible for the formation coastal sand beach and sand dunes.

What are Sand Dunes?

Coastal Sand dunes are a natural wonder with beauty and majesty. Large mounds or hills or ridge of sand found close to beaches are called sand dunes. They are in fact extensions of the beach into the land. While a beach is closely linked to the sea and controlled by waves and tides, the dunes are linked to land and are controlled by winds. Three things are needed for dune formation: a large supply of sand, wind speeds capable of

moving grains of sand and an ideal location for its accumulation with some flora. Generally dune sand is fine sand from the beach that is blown inland by the winds. Dunes are formed when the sand brought in by the wind is trapped by plants or other obstacles. Small mounds formed by sand, which is trapped, gradually expand to form dunes. Dune grasses anchor the dunes with their roots, holding them in place. While their leaves trap sand promoting dune expansion. Dunes are not permanent structures. Sand dunes provide sand storage and supply for adjacent beaches. Sand dunes can be of various shapes, such as crescents, stars or just repeated lines.

Classification of Coastal Dunes :

Depending on the characteristics and availability of the sediment supply, dominant wind velocity and direction, moisture and vegetation present, and the geomorphology of the nearshore and beach face, dunes of various size and morphology are formed (Sloss et al.). Sand deposition, accretion, and erosion within the coastal environment result in the development of a variety of dune morphologies; however, a general classification into primary and secondary dunes can be made (Davis 1980, Masselink & Hughes 2003). Primary dunes are composed of sand blown directly from the beach face (active beach), whereas secondary dunes develop following the subsequent modification of primary dunes.

Primary Dunes

Davies (1980) defined "primary dunes" as dunes with a sand supply derived primarily from the beach and "impeded primary" dunes as those in which vegetation plays a major role (i.e., impedes downwind transport) in the development of the dune. It is situated nearest to the ocean and are affected most significantly by waves and salt spray.

Secondary dunes (or rear dune)

Foredunes develop at the rear of the backshore environments (landward of the active beach) and generally comprise shore-parallel, convex, symmetrical to asymmetrical dune ridges. This are located further inland and are not often directly exposed to marine influences. The morphology of foredunes is varied but they can be classified into three main types: incipient foredunes, established foredunes, and relict foredunes (Short & Hesp 1982, Hesp 2002).



Formation of Sand dune

Sand Dune Flora :

Sand dune vegetation or psammophytes comprise vital components of coastal sand dune habitats owing to their bioengineering role in sediment accumulation, sand binding and land building processes. Plants play a very important role in dunes because they are directly responsible for establishing dune structures. Conditions on dunes are quite similar to deserts making life here hard. Some of these conditions are:

- High amount of sand moved around
- Salty winds blowing in from the sea
- Exposure to very high temperatures
- High speed of winds
- Very little fresh water available in dune systems.

The plants are present in three zones and show characteristics to confront these conditions.

1. Pioneers

Plants closest to the sea, made up of mostly creeping grasses with fleshy leaves and stem. Pioneer plants have adapted to the harsh conditions on dunes by having rapid growth to outpace sand accumulation, fleshy parts to store water, roots that reach deep into the sand in search of water and even a creeping nature that helps them to creep over shifting sand. The most common pioneer plants are the runners *Ipomoea pes-caprae* (Goat's foot convolvulus/Attukal), *Sesuvium portulacastrum*, and *Spinifex littoreus* (Ravanameesai).



Ipomoea pes-caprae



Sesuvium portulacastrum



***Spinifex littoreus* (Ravanameesai)**



2. Shrubs

This includes a mixture of plants from the pioneer zone and shrubs. They face moderate sand movement and lower salt loads, though temperatures remain extreme. *Tephrosia pupurea*, *Ziziphus jujuba*, *Prosopis* sp. (Karuvai), *Cyperus arenarius*, *Calamus rotang*, *Opuntia dilleni* Cacti(Kalli) are some of the species found in this zone.



Calamus rotang



Opuntia dilleni Cacti (Kalli)

3. Trees

Trees grow behind the shelter of large dunes in areas of good rainfall. The development of the forest can take very long and needs special conditions of soils, moisture, humus and protection (eg. Reserve forest located in Kodiakarai in Tamil Nadu). *Anacardium occidentale* (Cashew /mundri), *Tamarindus indica* (Tamarind tree/ Pulimaram), *Bororus flabellifer* (Toddy Palm/Panamaram), *Pandanus odoratissimus*, *Casuarina equisetifolia*, *Calophyllum inophyllum*, *Cocos nucifera* are some common trees that do well on dunes.



***Bororus flabellifer* (Panamaram) and *Anacardium occidentale* (Cashew /mundri)**

Other common Floral habitat in Puducherry sand dunes :

In India, totally 154 species belonging to 108 genera and 41 families were present in coastal sand dunes. The common floral species present in Puducherry regions are *Acalypha indica*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Aeschynomene aspera*, *Boerhaavia diffusa*, *Bulbostylis barbata*, *Canavalia cathartica*, *Croton bonplandianus*, *Desmodium trifolium*, *Zoysia matrella*, *Tribulus terrestris*, *Hydrophylax maritima*, *Ipomea pes-caprae*, *Sesuvium portulacastrum*.

Adaptations of CSD Flora :

Sand dune plants have adapted to harsh environmental conditions—such as high temperatures, dryness, occasional inundation by saltwater, salt spray, and the accumulation of sand. These plants are also called Native coastal vegetation protects the beach and dune system. This vegetation enhances the natural beauty of the coastal landscape and provides food, protective cover, and nesting sites for small animals. Whenever possible, coastal property owners should incorporate native vegetation into their dune and garden landscape plans. These plants are well adapted to life at the coast and are easy to maintain. They require less water, fertilizer and pesticides, which ultimately save time, money, and reduce pollution from unnecessary chemicals. Moreover, native coastal dune plants help protect the area by stabilizing the sand with deep roots and by trapping new sand to build and maintain the dune. A key component that guarantees stability of coastal sand dunes (CSDs) is vegetation.

The CSD flora of India is under constant anthropogenic pressure due to rapid elimination of sand dunes and its associated vegetation. The prevailing Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification classify sand dunes under CRZ-1A. A coastal vegetation conservation policy that ensures a succession of species as a long term sustainable option to maintain biodiversity of coastal flora.



Stability of coastal sand dunes by its vegetation



Sand dune and wet land seen near Manapet village in Puducherry

Dune Fauna :

Large fauna are rarely seen on dunes. Many species of lizards, beetles and bugs are specially adapted to life in dunes. Some small mammals like voles, mice, hares and foxes have been reported from sand dunes. Reptiles, amphibians and some bird life are also present. The Blackbuck is a native antelope of India and is found in the dunes and coastal Reserve forests of Kodiakarai in Tamil Nadu.

Microscopic meiofauna of sand dunes include nematodes, turbellarians, gastrotrichs, copepods, ostracods, amphipods, decapods and polychaetes. Insects of the orders, Hymenoptera, Coleoptera and Diptera and butterflies are found in certain seasons. Vertebrates include reptiles like the fan-throated lizard (*Sitana ponticeriana*), sand boa (*Eryx conicus*), birds like terns and gulls, a few small raptors, Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) are commonly reported to nest along the Puducherry coast.

Importance of Sandy Beaches and Sand Dunes :

The seas we live next to get violent every once in a while and powerful storms, cyclones and huge waves lash our coastline. Sandy beaches and dunes are the sentinels of the coast. They act like shields that bear all the heavy impacts of the waves and prevent the furious winds from destroying homes and crops. They also prevent the seawater from entering into lands, wells and ponds. They also protect us from salt laden winds that could cause serious damage to crops and buildings.

Apart from this CSDs act like a sponge to store rain water, filter the salt water and conserve them for CSD vegetation growth and for local people use. It seems that therein water stored in CSDs is seeped out and nourish the immediate coastal wet lands seen in the form of ponds, paddy fields agriculture lands. This is evident from the coastal regions from Manapet to Pannithittu in Puducherry. In some Places farmers construct bunds next to sand dune and make small canals and water their crops.



Water from Coastal Sand Dunes nourishing the wetlands



Water from Coastal Sand Dunes nourishing the wetlands

Hard protective structures like seawalls :

These can mean very bad news for our sandy beaches and dunes. Granite bricks of various sizes are laid to prevent sea erosion and sea level raise. They block the sea and prevent it from meeting the beach areas. This means seawalls actually prevent the sea from depositing its sand and other material on the beach. It is very important that the sea and the beach get to meet each other for the shaping and growth of both beaches and dunes. If the sea is prevented from making such deposits on the beach, then the dune flora and fauna also suffer. Our sand dunes might become weaker and more vulnerable to destruction. This will also prevent constant natural littoral drift of coastal sand from south to north and it result in frequent sea erosion and destroying coastal human habitations. This is often occurring in the coastal areas of Solai Nagar, Kottakuppam which are located next to Puducherry which is protected by sea wall.



Hard protective structures like seawalls In Puducherry



Sea erosion and destruction of human habitation in Solai Nagar near Puducherry

Human habitation:

Increasing human population has led to more houses and constructions along the coast. Many of these settlements happen on sand dunes. This is a major threat to dune ecology and structure. People living in CSDs modify the habitat by various activities like burning the vegetation, polluting the area, construction of concrete structures etc.



Human habitation near the coastal region of Puducherry and burning of vegetation

Urban development:

Urban and Tourism development on the beach involves a lot of construction. At times buildings, swimming pools and roads are made after razing and digging out dunes and tons of sand. The concrete structures will not allow the rain water to seep into the sand.

Pollution:

Pollution of all kinds is affecting beaches and sand dunes. Oil spills and dumping of solid wastes in the seas result in the arrival of all kinds of pollutants like “tar balls” plastic materials on beaches. Littering on the beach not only makes our beautiful beaches and dunes look ugly it also is harmful to the organisms that live there. Aquaculture is another threat to our coastal regions.



Coastal Pollution

Erosion :

Natural forces of the waves and winds erode and simultaneously build sandy beaches and sand dunes. Sometimes due to natural factors and now more and more due to human made factors erosion is becoming a big problem. However, it is possible to a certain extent to lessen the negative effects of human activities by better practices, sharing more information amongst the community and starting Protection and Restoration programmes.

Protecting and Restoring Sand Dunes and Sandy Beaches : Coastal Sacred Groves :

Based on culture and belief system our ancestors created coastal sand dune Sacred Groves. Here CSD vegetations are protected. In Puducherry two CSD Sacred Groves are situated. One in Manapet where the presiding Deity is Iyanarappan. The second is present in Nallavadu where the presiding Deity is Kuttiandavar.



Coastal sand dune Sacred Groves

Legal protection for sand dunes and sandy beaches :

Explicit legal protection is afforded to the Indian coastline by the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 1991 as amended in 2011, issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. It does this by firstly zoning the entire coast on the basis of the demographic and ecological characteristics into CRZ-I, II and III areas. CRZ-I are ecologically sensitive areas where activities are largely prohibited, CRZ-II comprise developed areas and CRZ-III comprise all rural areas as well as undeveloped areas in urban limits. The notification declares all coastal stretches of seas, bays, estuaries, creeks, rivers and backwaters which are influenced by tidal action (in the landward side) up to 500 m from the High Tide Line (HTL) and the land between the Low Tide Line (LTL) and the HTL as the Coastal Regulation Zone. In this CRZ, it then overlays regulations on development, namely a set of prohibited and permitted activities pertaining to each zone. The CRZ Notification explicitly mandates the protection of sand dunes. According to the notification, sand mining is a prohibited activity on the mainland coast. Section 2(ix) of the notification prohibits the 'mining of sands, rocks and other substrate materials' within the CRZ areas. The notification also prohibited the 'dressing or alteration' of sand dunes, hills and natural features for either beautification or recreation or landscape changes.

CRZ & Sand Dunes :

The Ministry of Environment, Forest, Government of India published Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), Notification, 2011 on 16.01.2011. For the purpose of conserving and protecting the coastal areas and marine waters. The sand dunes are classified as CRZ – IA Ecologically Sensitive areas as per notification.

The Guidelines and protection measures for Sand dunes as per the CRZ Notification, 2011 is reproduced below:

- i. Sand dunes, beach stretches along the bays and creeks shall be surveyed and mapped. No activity shall be permitted on such sand dune areas;
- ii. Dressing or altering the sand dunes, hills, natural features including landscape changes for beautification, recreation and other such purpose.
- iii. Extraction of sand, leveling or digging of sandy stretches except for structural foundation of building, swimming pool shall not be permitted within 500 metres of the High Tide Line;

Meanwhile the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India published Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019 vide dated 18.01.2019 under this notification also the Sand dunes are classified as CRZ - IA Ecologically Sensitive Area.

The Guidelines and protection measures for Sand dunes as per the CRZ Notification, 2019 is reproduced below:

Geo-morphologically Important Zones shall be protected and managed as follows: (i) Sand dunes identified shall be conserved and protected as follows:

- a. Sand dunes identified shall be notified under Environment (Protection) Act 1986;
- b. No developmental activities shall be permissible except for providing eco-friendly temporary tourism facilities on stilts such as walkways, tents and the like;
- c. Mining of sand from sand dunes shall be prohibited activity except for the removal of atomic minerals with proper replenishment using the tailings or other suitable sand;
- d. No activities on the sand dunes shall be taken up that would lead to erosion /destruction of sand dunes.
- e. Afforestation, if any, on the sand dunes shall be done only with native flora;
- f. The States or Union territory shall prepare management plans for the demarcated sand dunes.

Ecologically Sensitivity area map can be view at:

<https://dste.py.gov.in/PCZMA/Map.html>

CRZ Notification, 2011 can be seen at:

<https://dste.py.gov.in/PCZMA/Pdf/Notification/CRZ-Notification-2011.pdf>

Preventing threats:

It is understood how valuable and important sand dunes and sandy beaches are to the coastal people and to the organism which rely on it. But how do we protect them? Prevention is better than cure! First we need to find out what can destroy our sand dunes and sandy beaches. We have to give awareness to stake holders about these threats like- sand mining, building sea walls or pollution on the beach.

Planting :

First prepare a nursery of local, strong species that are salt tolerant. Plant these saplings in a checker board pattern. Checker-board of 1m square boxes on both the slope of the dunes facing the sea and the slope facing land. The part of the dunes facing the sea should be planted with lots of creeping plants like goat's foot convolulus (attukkal) and sand Spinifex (Ravanameesai). Local plant species like palm trees should be planted in the back dunes in parallel lines. Seeds of other local grasses and shrubs should be sprinkled to allow natural growth. Planting should be done in the rainy season and plants have to be regularly watered in the dry seasons.

Soil enrichment :

In puducherry and Karaikal many restoration programmes were carried out after Tsunami. Coconut and Casuarinas plantations were carried out in many coastal regions involving NGOs. One such example in Karaikal is noteworthy to mention.

Karukkalacherry in Karaikal has vast areas of natural sand dune ecosystems, where many areas were considerably degraded. Puducherry based NGO- FERAL carried out dune restoration in an area of 8.88 ha. The presence of a dune structure and continued community participation were also factors that favored selection of this site. The area available for restoration also includes area under Casuarina plantation in the southern part of the beach. The deposition of sand around the fence erected for protecting Casuarina from cattle, has resulted in the formation of a dune structure, with a slope rising up to 1.3 m, both seaward and landward. Landward structures are presently found between the front dune and back dune zones. Remnants of the natural dunes, with an area of 0.54 ha, can be found just south of the settlement. However, according to local people, except for a small portion, dune structures were largely damaged during the tsunami, as it acted as a barrier and sand was carried inland by the water. It has been reported that run up heights for the tsunami waters along Karaikal coastal region had been 2.63 m.

Awareness:

The awareness program shall be organized among public, students about the importance of sand dunes ecosystem.



Coconut and Casuarinas plantations

Likewise in Puducherry Forest Department took afforestation programme at Manapet CSD successfully. Many sand dune plants and Tropical Dry Evergreen species were planted.



Afforestation programme at Manapet CSD

Another organisation OIKOS Trust for Environmental Management Puducherry has involved in restoring and regenerating the CSDs in Nallavadu Puducherry under the project "Green Coast for Future of Nature and People after the Tsunami", supported by Wet Lands International, WWF, OXFAM, IUCN and Both Ends. Same manner afforestation programme was carried in CSDs of Chinna Veerampattinam, Puducherry.





Regeneration of CSDs in Nallavadu and ChinnaVeerampattinam in Puducherry by NGOs

Conclusion :

A key component that guarantees stability of coastal sand dunes (CSDs) is vegetation. The CSD flora of India is under constant anthropogenic pressure due to rapid elimination of sand dunes and its associated vegetation. The prevailing Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) shall be tightened to protect the health of sand dune and to maintain biodiversity. A coastal vegetation conservation policy that ensures a succession of species in the form of a three layered vegetation is essential as a long term sustainable option to maintain biodiversity of coastal flora in Sand dunes and sand beaches to extend their ecosystem service for the coastal people and its environs.

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Puducherry Environment Events

World Wetlands Day Celebration, 2020

On this special occasion, photo release of Dr. Dhruvajothi Ghosh (Engineer Ecologist) followed by a special lecture on Wetland and Biodiversity delivered by Envis Coordinator on 31.01.2020 at Centre for Pollution Control and Environmental Engineering, Pondicherry University, Puducherry. In the end, awareness posters and pamphlet were released. The value-added products were distributed to students to spread the message on the importance of Wetlands and Biodiversity. Nearly 50 Students participated in the event.



Inception Workshop on Revision of U.T. of Puducherry State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC)

ENVIS Team Attended Inception Workshop on Revision of U.T. of Puducherry State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) at Hotel Sunway Manor, Puducherry on 06.01.2020 organised by Puducherry Climate Change Cell, Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Puducherry.



Training programme on “Pollution Monitors: Air and Water Pollution” under Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP)

Training programme on “Pollution Monitors: Air and Water Pollution” under Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP) at level- 6 was conducted by Puducherry Envis Hub Centre, Puducherry Pollution Control Committee at Dr. Abdul Kalam Science Centre and Planetarium, Lawspet, Puducherry. The training programme for a period of 31 working days (17th February to 21st March, 2020, 260 hours) and the training module included theoretical, practical, field visits and assignments. 27 Nos. trainees were attended the above said certificate course.





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