

1.1.2 Forestry

Forests constitute Nepal's largest natural resource in terms of coverage. The majority of Nepalese use forest products as firewood, food, fodder, timber and medicines. The pressure due to population growth is one of the main causes for forest depletion. The extensive utilization and increasing demands for forest products has led to its dwindling both in area and quality. Table 1.3 presents the rate of forest depletion during the period of 1978 – 1994.

Table 1.3 Changes in Forest and Shrub Cover (1978-1994)

Type	LRMP (1978-79)	Master Plan (1985-86)	NFI (1994)
Forest	38.0	37.4	29.0
Shrub	4.7	4.8	10.6
Total	42.7	42.2	39.6

Source: DFRS, 1999

About 29 per cent of the total area of Nepal is under forest coverage with additional 10.6 per cent as shrubs or degraded forests. The forest area, which was 37 per cent in 1986 and 45 per cent in 1966, has declined considerably. Although the total area under forestry administration has slightly decreased, the shrub land area has doubled from 4.8 per cent in mid-1980 to 10.6 percent in mid-1990 (Table 1.3). The annual deforestation is estimated to be 1.7 per cent with 2.3 per cent in the Hills, and 1.3 per cent in the Terai (MFSC, 1999). Similarly, the growing stocks of forests have declined from 522 million m³ in mid-1980s to 387.5 million m³ in 1999.

The major characteristic features of forest resource has been identified as follows:

- ✍ About 80 per cent of the total populations depend on forests for fuel wood (WECS 1997).
- ✍ The fuel consumption for household and industries is estimated at 15.4 million tonnes per year for 2000 as compared to 11.3 million tonnes per year in 1985. Per capita fuel wood consumption in the Hills is estimated to be 640 kg, while it is 479 kg/person/year for the Terai. The per capita timber consumption per annum was estimated at 0.07 m³/year in 1985 and is estimated to have increased to 0.11 m³/year by the year 2000 on the basis of the national timber demand projected to be about 2.5 million m³ by 2000 (HMG/ADB/FINNIDA, 1988).
- ✍ About 42 per cent of the fodder supply for total digestible nutrient (TDN) for cattle is met from forests. It is also predicted that there will be a deficit in the available TDN for the cattle by about 0.2 million tonnes by the year 2010 in the country as a whole (HMG/ADB/FINNIDA, 1988)

Forest depletion has a direct linkage with the decline in agricultural production. Rural people face difficulty in meeting the energy and fodder demand. Forest depletion also increases soil loss, landslide and floods. It may have also increased the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Furthermore, drying up of springs, and loss of biodiversity or change in wildlife habitat are also attributed to forest depletion.

Decline in forests and agricultural production has encouraged the rural people to migrate from Hill to Terai and/or rural to urban areas, and there is an increasing pressure

on natural resources and urban services. Forest destruction has also been caused by forest fires. Area deforested by forest fires is estimated at 15 thousand ha with the financial loss of about USD 127,000 (DOF, 1999).