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Summary

The Western Ghats is a global biodiversity hotspot where 74 percent of existing forests remain outside protected areas. The lack of economic opportunities for most landowners drives them to lease out forests to logging contractors. Since the causes of deforestation are directly linked to the economic needs of the local populace, an incentive-based mechanism for private land conservation was tested by conservation -non governmental organization (NGO) Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) in Ratnagiri District in the north Western Ghats. The use of incentives for conservation - termed here as "conservation agreements" -- is a tried and tested strategy in countries such as North and South America, however new to India. This paper presents the need for this strategy for regions such as the north Western Ghats as well as discusses the workings and experiences of a pilot project while associating with various stakeholder groups in the region. In conclusion, the use of this strategy and its expansion and implementation in other parts of India where protected area networks may be poor is recommended.

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