

WHITE PAPER

Present Status of Cluster of Mattewara Jungles

A Call for Immediate Action for Ecological Security and Sustainable Development in Punjab.

Dated: 10 March 2026

The cluster of Mattewara Jungles, historically forming part of the sacred and famous Machiwara Jungles, represents one of the last remaining natural forest landscapes in the Ludhiana region of Punjab. These remnants today serve as an ecological refuge for biodiversity, a natural shield protecting the floodplains of the Sutlej River, and an environmental lifeline for the people of Punjab.

This forest cluster spreads across several villages including Mattewara, Garhi Fazal, Jaspal Kadar, Haider Nagar, New Haider Nagar, Chaunta Mand and Salempur, located in Koom Kallan Tehsil of Ludhiana, adjoining the floodplains of the Sutlej River. These forests collectively form an environmentally sensitive ecosystem that plays a critical role in climate resilience, groundwater recharge, biodiversity conservation and ecological balance in the region.

Background

The Government of Punjab had earlier proposed establishing a Textile Industrial Park on approximately 950 acres of land acquired by GLADA, located in the midst of this forest cluster.

Environmentalists, villagers, farmers, religious institutions, students and civil society strongly raised concerns that such an industrial project would severely damage the fragile ecosystem and river floodplains.

In response to these concerns, a mass public gathering was organized by the Public Action Committee (PAC) – Mattewara Jungles, River Satluj and Buddha Darya on 10 July 2022 near Dhussi Bundh Gurdwara Sahib, Village Garhi Fazal, on the southern bank of the Sutlej River. The gathering represented a powerful democratic expression by the people demanding protection of the Mattewara forest ecosystem.

Recognizing the environmental sensitivity of the area and respecting the sentiments of the people, S. Bhagwant Singh Mann Ji, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Punjab, took a historic and visionary decision on 11 July 2022 during a meeting with PAC representatives at Chandigarh.

Historic Decision of the Government of Punjab

The Hon'ble Chief Minister announced:

Cancellation of the proposed Textile Industrial Park

Conversion of the acquired land and surrounding forest cluster into an International Standard Biodiversity Park

Upgradation of the forests from Protected Forest status

Development of the area as a major ecological and eco-tourism destination

Conservation of the Sutlej River floodplains ecosystem

Interlinking of forest patches along the river corridor

This decision was widely welcomed across Punjab and was seen as a landmark policy move prioritizing ecology over industrialization in a sensitive zone.

PAC Proposal for Ecological Development

Following directions from the Hon'ble Chief Minister, the Public Action Committee (PAC) was asked to prepare a detailed proposal in consultation with the Forest Department.

Accordingly, PAC submitted a comprehensive proposal on 31 August 2022 after detailed discussions with the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Ludhiana, and other stakeholders.

The proposal included:

Major Recommendations

Development of the entire forest cluster as an enhanced Biodiversity Conservation Landscape with greater potential

Interlinking forest patches along the Sutlej floodplains

Expansion of wildlife habitats and ecological corridors

Promotion of eco-tourism and environmental education

Strengthening forest protection and restoration of degraded patches

Establishment of a High-Level University of Environmental Sciences and Environmental Law

The proposed university was envisioned to:

Encourage youth participation in environmental protection

Conduct scientific research on ecological restoration

Address environmental challenges of Punjab

Promote sustainable development models for the future

Government Correspondence and Acknowledgements

The PAC proposal received formal acknowledgement from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) through official communication dated 17 October 2022, directing the matter for further action to the Chief Secretary and the Department of Forest and Wildlife, Government of Punjab.

Additionally, the Deputy Commissioner Ludhiana, through letter dated 16 September 2022, forwarded the proposal to the Chief Administrator GLADA for necessary action regarding the land involved.

The proposal was also personally presented to the Government of India. A PAC delegation met Ms. Leena Nandan, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, at Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, New Delhi on 07 November 2022, requesting support to enhance forest cover and biodiversity conservation in Punjab.

However, since these official communications, no further visible progress or correspondence has been observed from either the State or the Central Government regarding implementation of the proposed ecological transformation.

Community-Led Environmental Initiatives

Despite administrative delays, the PAC and civil society organizations have continued their environmental efforts in collaboration with government agencies.

Major Community Initiatives

Vanmahotsav & Anniversary Celebrations

Annual plantation drives and awareness programs have been organized:

09 July 2023 – First Anniversary of Saving Mattewara Jungles

11 July 2024 – Second Anniversary

01–06 July 2025 – Third Anniversary celebrations

These events included:

Plantation of native tree species

Environmental workshops

Student awareness programs

Community interactions

Participation by NGOs, villagers and religious organizations

Participants included representatives from:

Punjab Agricultural University

Indian Council of Agricultural Research

Environmental activists

Scientists & ECRs

Panchayats and villagers

Notable Contributions Support from Sant Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal Ji

Sant Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal Ji, Member of Rajya Sabha, contributed a solar-powered 3 HP motor pump mounted on a trolley with Solar Panels to facilitate irrigation of newly planted saplings in the forest area.

Ecological Infrastructure Development

ICAR is constructing a Check Dam on a drainage channel passing through the Mattewara forests to create a waterhole for wildlife and groundwater recharge.

A Drip Irrigation System is under planning with collaboration between the Forest Department, ICAR and the Soil & Water Conservation Department.

Efforts are underway to upgrade the Butterfly Park and Botanical Garden located in the forest area.

Present Status of Mattewara Jungle Cluster

Despite the historic policy decision and strong community engagement, several critical issues remain unresolved:

Major Concerns

Slow transfer of acquired GLADA land to the Forest Department

Land record discrepancies in Chaunta Mand Forest area, requiring immediate correction by the Revenue Department

Pending overhead Rahon Road project passing through Mattewara forests

Need for repair and maintenance of internal forest link roads

No upgradation yet from the current Protected Forest status

These delays risk weakening the momentum created by the historic decision taken in July 2022.

Mattewara as a Sustainable Development Model

The Mattewara forest ecosystem has the potential to become a flagship Sustainable Green Mission Model for Punjab.

If developed as envisioned, it can serve as:

A major biodiversity conservation landscape

A climate resilience zone

A center for ecological research and education

A national example of community-driven environmental governance

A major eco-tourism destination

Such a transformation would attract:

environmental researchers

eco-conscious citizens

nature enthusiasts

students and international collaborators

Appeal to Governments

The Public Action Committee (PAC) respectfully reminds both the Government of Punjab and the Government of India of the commitments made towards ecological protection of Mattewara.

The time has now come to translate promises into concrete action.

PAC Requests

Immediate steps should be taken to:

Expedite transfer of GLADA land to the Forest Department

Correct land record discrepancies

Upgrade the forest cluster status as proposed

Provide financial and administrative support for ecological restoration

Develop Mattewara as an International Standard Biodiversity and Eco-tourism Landscape

Upcoming Community Initiative

PAC has scheduled a major environmental program from 01 July to 06 July 2026 which will include:

Vanmahotsav celebrations

Fourth Anniversary of Saving Mattewara Jungles

Buddha Darya Padyatras

Plantation drives

Environmental workshops

Free health check-up camps

Public awareness campaigns

These initiatives will involve collaboration among government departments, universities, NGOs, scientists, religious organizations, industrialists and the local community.

Conclusion

The Mattewara Jungles are not merely a forest patch — they represent hope for ecological revival in Punjab.

Protecting and developing this region can demonstrate that economic progress and environmental protection can coexist through visionary governance and community participation.

With sincere cooperation between citizens and governments, Mattewara can emerge as a symbol of sustainable development and environmental stewardship for India and the world.

One for All – All for One

Col CM Lakhanpal

Member

PAC – Mattewara Jungles, River Satluj & Buddha Darya, Ludhiana, Punjab.

Contact: 94171 38044
