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Conrad: Govt to conserve 1 lakh hectares of forest under Green Meghalaya+

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Shillong: Meghalaya targets conserving 1 lakh hectares of forest under Green Meghalaya+, CM Conrad K Sangma said, noting the state has about 17,000 sq km of forest cover.

Under the Green Meghalaya+ initiative, forest owners and communities are incentivised to conserve forests through payments of Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 per hectare under the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) concept.

Sangma said over 2,800 beneficiaries have so far conserved nearly 40,000 hectares across the state. He was speaking at a programme in Tura on Saturday where cheques were handed over to beneficiaries.

A total of Rs 77.21 crore has been disbursed under Green Meghalaya+, including Rs 34.73 crore in the Garo Hills region, he said, adding that around Rs 48 crore will be released to beneficiaries in the current phase.

In South West Garo Hills, incentives worth Rs 48.23 lakh are being distributed to beneficiaries from Rerapara, Zikzak and Betasing blocks, covering 551.18 hectares of forest area under conservation.

Sangma also spoke about the FOCUS+ programme, launched in July 2022, which provides direct financial support of Rs 5,000 annually to eligible producer households across the state to strengthen rural livelihoods.

The scheme follows a “one beneficiary per household” rule “to ensure fairness and avoid duplication,” he said. During the initial rollout in 2022–23, 1,50,662 beneficiaries received Rs 75.33 crore, he added.

After a verification exercise integrated with the Meghalaya One Portal, 93,285 beneficiaries were confirmed as eligible, while those removed were allowed to reapply through the portal, Sangma said.

He said payments for 2023–24 were delayed to strengthen the system, after which Rs. 2,500 was released in August 2025 and another Rs. 2,500 in December 2025, totalling Rs 46.64 crore.

For 2024–25, the government is releasing the first tranche of Rs 2,500 for 93,285 verified beneficiaries and 11,133 newly verified households from the Garo Hills region, taking the total households supported under FOCUS+ to 1,04,418, he said.

So far, Rs 148.08 crore has been disbursed under the scheme, Sangma said, adding that in the Garo Hills, the current tranche will benefit 81,046 households, including 11,133 new beneficiaries, with Rs 20.26 crore being released across five districts.

In South West Garo Hills, 14,017 beneficiaries will receive Rs 3.50 crore, he said.