

III. National Strategy for Forest-Based Ecological Civilization

From Ecological Crisis to Policy Transformation

Recognizing that economic growth alone was unsustainable, China shifted its development philosophy in the 1990s, introducing concepts such as *sustainable development* and *green development*. In 2005, the “Two Mountains Theory” (*lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets*) was proposed; in 2007, the concept of “Ecological Civilization” was first proposed at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China; and in 2018 it was written into the Constitution as a national strategy. The *Forest Law* integrated forest protection into Ecological Civilization, while the establishment of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and the nationwide *Forest Chief System* further institutionalized protection. Forests are now central to China’s dual-carbon strategy as key carbon sinks.

National Ecological Security Projects

Natural Forest Protection Program: Banned commercial logging of natural forests and restored ecological barriers, marking a historical turning point started in 1998.

Grain-for-Green Program: The world’s largest ecological restoration project, converting farmland to forest and improving both forest cover and rural livelihoods with ecological subsidies since 1999.

Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program: Covering 4.36 million km² across 13 provinces of North China, Northwest China, and Northeast China, designed to combat desertification, stabilize soils, and improve climate conditions through 2050 since 1978. Its practices and experiences in combating desertification will be further introduced in the Chapter of Deserts.

National Park System: Established parks such as Sanjiangyuan, Giant Panda, and Qianjiangyuan National Parks, protecting flagship species and ecosystems while integrating cultural heritage and community development and strengthening the win-win of nature and social prosperity since 2015.

Together, these programs raised China’s forest coverage from 16–17% in the late 20th century to over 25% by 2023. With the world’s largest area of planted forests, China is now the fastest-growing forest resource nation globally.

National Policy and Public Participation

China combines top-down strategies with bottom-up participation. Environmental education and Ecological Civilization courses are embedded in school curricula, instilling green values in youth. By linking traditional cultural wisdom with modern environmental awareness, the nation promotes collective action toward building a “Beautiful China.”

中国森林覆盖率变化时间轴 (1949-2026)

Timeline of China's Forest Coverage (1949-2026)



数据来源: 历次全国森林资源清查公报、国家林业和草原局发布数据

Source: National Forest Resource Inventory Reports, National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China

注: 2025年、2026年数据为基于趋势估算的预测值。

Note: Data for 2025 and 2026 are estimated based on current trends.