

Research Article

Understanding high altitude mountain steppe: A review of current literature on rangelands in Changthang, Ladakh, India

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ABSTRACT

Rangeland systems are dynamic and large-scale changes in their social and ecological characteristics can lead to degradation and remains a cause of worry worldwide, including the rangelands of Changthang in the Trans Himalayan region of Ladakh. Rigorous research on different aspects of rangeland systems are required to develop a sustainable conservation-based management strategy. In this article, we review the existing literature on the rangelands of Changthang to identify various trends and patterns of research knowledge related to this landscape to identify significant knowledge gaps. In our review, we found that wildlife studies dominate the research knowledge generated from the area. We found some important patterns in this literature with a very prominent discourse on 'overgrazing by livestock', which it identifies as the primary reason for rangeland degradation and wildlife population decline in Changthang. We argue that this discourse is a reflection of deep-rooted knowledge structures that conceptualise nature and society as dichotomous concepts. It thus provides limited insights into interactions between human, wildlife and livestock on the rangelands of Changthang. We identify this as an important knowledge gap along with the need for habitat assessment to identify other possible threats to rangelands such as land-use changes, developmental changes, invasive plant species and climate change. Addressing these knowledge gaps will provide crucial inputs for developing robust strategies and policies for sustainable rangeland management and conservation strategies to support resource-dependent human and wildlife communities.

Keywords: Community based rangeland management, Pastureland, Rangeland degradation, Rangeland management, Trans Himalayas, Ungulate-livestock interaction

