

# Green focus helps grow Guangdong economy

Environmental initiative creates public leisure assets and spurs agricultural and forestry industries



A panoramic view of the West Lake in Huizhou, Guangdong province. The province has taken action to improve its environment, with its forest coverage now surpassing 53 percent. HUIZHOU PHOTO AGENCY



By HAO NAN  
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South China's Guangdong province has made significant strides in advancing the "Green and Beautiful Guangdong" initiative in recent years, aiming to promote ecological conservation and green development.

This includes implementing six major actions and adhering to an integrated approach to protect and systematically manage mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grassland and deserts.

Through continuous tree planting, land greening and better forest resource protection, Guangdong has become one of China's greenest provinces. According to the latest data from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, the prov-

ince now boasts a total forest area of 9.53 million hectares and a forest coverage rate of 53.03 percent.

Chen Junguang, head of Guangdong Forestry Administration, said by 2035, the province plans to upgrade 1 million hectares of forest by introducing more plant species, and improve the health status and productivity of 2 million hectares of forest.

As a result, Guangdong will have a more optimized forest structure featuring diverse tree species, layers and colors, Chen noted.

Since 2023, the province has invested 4.07 billion yuan (\$570.13 million) in the construction of 193 "Green and Beautiful Guangdong" ecological demonstration sites, mostly forest parks.

Also, it has established 15 new parks to showcase the implementation of China's innovative forestry administration mechanism called the "forest chief" scheme and the achievements of the "Green and

Beautiful Guangdong" ecological initiative.

Additionally, Guangdong has released 10 cultural tourism routes in the past two years, which integrate natural landscapes, Red culture and historical sites.

This year, the province plans to explore and utilize local resources, and build ecological demonstration sites centered around suburban and mountain parks.

Other goals set by the provincial government include creating 30 provincial-level forest towns and 100 provincial-level forest villages this year, and designating 100 cultural tourism routes that feature natural scenery and Red culture by 2028.

Professor Xie Baojian from the School of Economics at Jinan University said the "Green and Beautiful Guangdong" ecological demonstration sites aim not only for greenery, but optimizing the ecological structure, bringing a more beautiful environment to the public and

enhancing overall living conditions.

"Under-forest economy, or the development of forest byproducts, is a new industry that promotes coordinated ecological and economic development. It also serves as an important engine for boosting the coordination of regional functions," Xie said.

Efforts should be made to increase forest land use through ecological protection, transform green resources into economic benefits, and harmonize regional green and economic functions, thereby driving sustainable local economic development, he noted.

In northern Guangdong, Shaoguan is known for its abundant *Sarcandra glabra*, a herb used in traditional Chinese medicine for various conditions.

With low maintenance costs and high market demand, the herb has become a cash crop for Chen Cui-ling's family in Ruyuan Yao autonomous county in Shaoguan. Chen

and her husband have established a related planting cooperative, where workers collect wild *Sarcandra glabra* seeds from the mountains, cultivate them in greenhouses and then replant them in the forest.

Chen said each worker can earn 100-200 yuan per day and the cooperative purchases the dried herb that meets quality standards from farmers at a high price.

Currently, the cooperative's annual output value has reached 6.8 million yuan, benefiting more than 260 households in nearby areas.

Guangdong has continued for years to promote forest-related industries to enrich the people. It has developed such industry clusters as bamboo, medicinal herbs, flowers and seedlings, furniture processing and *youcha*, a traditional appetizer made with tea and other ingredients.

The province has also established a benefit-sharing mechanism

between enterprises and farmers, enhancing the economic benefits of the "Green and Beautiful Guangdong" initiative.

As for the improvement of water ecology, Guangdong views the construction of waterside greenways as a key task, and completed 6,679 kilometers of greenways by the end of March. Currently, these greenways have become favorite places for local residents to get close to nature and enjoy leisure activities.

Thanks to the "Green and Beautiful Guangdong" initiative, the province's ecological and environmental indicators have remained stable or improved over the past few years.

For example, the concentration of six major pollutants across the province have met standards for nine consecutive years. Meanwhile, coastal water quality has reached its best historical level, with 92.3 percent of the area classified as excellent.



The GDToday Salon on the preservation of Chinese white dolphins is held on Aug 14 in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province. ZHANG GUANJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## White dolphins among the animals protected by reserves and policies

By HAO NAN

Last week, a group of journalists and photographers from national, provincial and municipal media outlets, as well as from Hong Kong and Macao, paid a visit to Zhanjiang, a coastal city in Guangdong province, along with some Chinese and international students.

They observed Chinese white dolphins, marine ranches and mangroves that demonstrate Guangdong's achievements in marine ecological protection and local ecological civilization development.

In Leizhou Bay, they saw dozens of Chinese white dolphins leaping out of the water, swimming in pods under the blue sky.

The Chinese white dolphin, also known as the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, is nicknamed the "giant panda of the sea" and is under first-class State protection. It is also listed as a vulnerable species on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List.

As these rare creatures have high water quality requirements, their presence speaks volumes for the stability and health of the sea's ecosystem, experts said.

Official statistics show that the Leizhou Bay is home to nearly 1,000 Chinese white dolphins. It also has a Chinese white dolphin nature reserve, which is one of the seven such reserves established in China.

Surrounded by the sea on three sides, Zhanjiang offers an ideal habitat for the Chinese white dolphin due to its superior marine ecosystem, said Yang Feng, a senior engineer from the city's ocean and

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marine nature reserves established in Guangdong province

fishery bureau. Yang was speaking at a GDToday Salon themed "A Date with Chinese White Dolphins" held on Aug 14 in Zhanjiang.

Zhanjiang boasts some 15,000 square kilometers of nearshore waters and has a coastline stretching nearly 1,244 km, accounting for 30.2 percent of the province's total. The city also has three typical marine ecosystems — mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass beds — with more than 2,000 marine species.

As a major maritime province, Guangdong has adopted an integrated approach to manage land and sea resources in recent years, and significantly improved the water quality of both nearshore areas and rivers flowing into the sea.

Currently, the province has established 16,600 sq km of marine ecological protection red lines, and boosted the protection of coastal zones, bays and islands through classified protection measures.

It has also optimized the layout of marine production, living and ecological spaces, enhanced the efficiency of artificial shoreline use and limited construction projects from occupying natural shorelines.

According to data from the Guangdong Marine Development Planning and Research Center, from 2019 to August 2023, Guangdong had invested nearly 2.68 billion yuan (\$374 million) in a 100-

km coastline restoration, 36-km beach restoration, the construction of 14 bays and other projects.

Additionally, it has established 119 marine nature reserves, covering a total area of 3,943 sq km. They have formed a comprehensive network to protect rare and endangered species like Chinese white dolphins and sea turtles, as well as typical marine ecosystems like coral reefs and mangroves.

Also, since bays are a key example and champion the Beautiful China Initiative in the marine ecological environment sector, Guangdong is pushing forward the beautiful bay protection and construction.

Zhang Yuming, deputy director of the marine ecological environment division of Guangdong Ecology and Environment Department, said the province has divided its nearshore waters into 59 bays, and highlighted pollution control, ecological protection and restoration, and beach environment management through a "one bay, one policy" approach.

In terms of financial investment, Guangdong will support eight pilot projects for beautiful bay construction during the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Currently, Qing'ao Bay in Shantou and Dapeng Bay in Shenzhen have been included in the first batch of the country's outstanding examples of beautiful bay construction.

This year, Guangdong has recommended Shenzhen's Daya Bay, Zhuhai's Wanshan Islands, Shanwei's Honghai Bay and Zhanjiang's Jinsha Bay to apply for the third batch of the country's outstanding examples of beautiful bay construction, Zhang said.

## Ecological endeavors aim to fire economic engines across province

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Within a national nature reserve in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, extensive mangrove forests grace the clear sea surface of Jinniu Island, with fish and shrimp living amid the songs of egrets, demonstrating the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

The vibrant mangrove forests impressed the members of an ecological field trip who visited on Friday. The group comprised reporters, photographers and international students from Guangdong. Guided by the Guangdong Provincial Government Information Office, the event was jointly organized by Nanfang Media Group, the information office of Zhanjiang and the province's news photographer association.

The protection and restoration of mangroves in Zhanjiang epitomizes Guangdong's ecological endeavors. Preserving mangroves and other wetlands stands as a pivotal aspect of the province's ecological initiatives. In the provincial government's work report, the establishment of several demonstration areas of mangroves spanning at least 667 hectares was made a key focus.

Guangdong boasts the largest expanse of mangroves among Chinese provinces, stretching from Raoping county in Chaozhou to Xuwen county in Zhanjiang. It encompasses 39 counties, districts and the province's 14 prefecture-level cities along the coast.

Currently, the province hosts 10,600 hectares of mangroves, accounting for 39.3 percent of the country's total.

Within Guangdong, three internationally significant wetlands and two provincially important wetlands have been designated with mangrove conservation. The province is home to a diverse array of mangrove plant species, comprising 27 species from 18 families and 24 genera.

According to a plan for mangrove forest demonstration areas in Guangdong, issued in early 2023, the province will establish four 667-hectare-level mangrove forest demonstration areas by 2025 in the coastal areas in Taishan in Jiangmen, Leizhou and Xuwen in Zhanjiang, and in Kaizhouyang in Huizhou. The total newly created and restored mangrove area is estimated to exceed 2,933 hectares.

By the end of 2023, approximately 2,656 hectares of new mangroves were established across the prov-



Zhanjiang, a coastal city in Guangdong province, boasts one of the largest mangrove reservations in China. XIAO ZILI / FOR CHINA DAILY

ince and around 2,010 hectares of existing mangroves were restored. Seven islands in the province have been selected as national-level "Harmonious and Beautiful Islands", accounting for one-fifth of the total number on the list.

Leveraging its mangrove forests, the province is in pursuit of sustainable growth.

As a typical coastal blue carbon ecosystem, mangroves feature a significantly higher carbon sequestration capacity per unit area compared to other forest ecosystems. These "blue carbon stars" have a high carbon sink capacity and longer carbon storage periods.

Since China proposed dual carbon goals in 2020, Guangdong has been at the forefront of exploring the development of and trade in blue carbon-sink products. These are embodied by mangroves, pioneering innovative trading models and establishing a new path to realize the value of mangrove carbon sinks.

In 2021, the province achieved a milestone by completing the first blue carbon sink program in the country — the Zhanjiang Mangrove Afforestation Project in Guangdong. It stands as China's inaugural mangrove carbon sink initiative. It is compliant with both the Verified Carbon Standard and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards certifications.

Building on this success, Shenzhen has initiated the country's first mangrove conservation carbon sink program, expanding the horizons of mangrove blue carbon sink products.

In May 2023, Shenzhen officially launched the methodology for carbon sequestration in mangrove

conservation programs, highlighting the ecological value generated by prominent mangrove conservation activities and filling the methodological gap in domestic carbon sink programs related to the preservation of natural ecosystems.

At the end of July, the 10-year mangrove carbon sink development rights for a mangrove afforestation program in Huidong county, Huizhou, were traded. Guangdong Energy Group Energy Conservation and Carbon Reduction Company won the bid with more than 4 million yuan (\$560,144).

This transaction set a record for the largest total volume and highest amount in domestic mangrove carbon sink trading to date, pioneering the trading of such development rights nationwide.

The development and utilization of mangroves remain focal points for local governments in the areas where Guangdong's mangroves are situated.

In Shiqiao village, nestled in the mangroves of Jinniu Island in Zhanjiang, residents have turned their attention to aquaculture and cultural tourism. Collaborating with the Zhanjiang Bay Laboratory, the village has adopted scientific approaches to cultivate aquatic products such as oysters, clams, cockles, fish, shrimps and crabs.



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