



City forest planned on 200 acres, will be continuation of Aravallis, say officials

The emphasis will be on the recreation of habitats, which includes trees, shrubs, climbers, herbs, annuals and grasses

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A 200-acre urban forest is likely to come up on Aravalli land interspersed between Sikanderpur and Chakkarpur, near the Aravalli Biodiversity Park, officials of the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) said, after signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a city-based non-governmental organisation for a period of eight years to develop the forest.

Subhash Yadav, head of the urban environment division of GMDA, said, "An MoU has been signed with iamgurgaon NGO for developing the city forest. Last year, encroachments were cleared from this area and since then, it was lying vacant. It was decided to develop the forest here, as it will increase green cover in the city and also help in maintaining the landscape because of its proximity to Aravalli Biodiversity Park."

As part of the project, the NGO aims to convert the area into a 'true forest', on the lines of those found in northern Aravallis.

Vijay Dhasmana, an eco-restoration practitioner, who helmed the development of the Aravalli Biodiversity Park and will develop this city forest too, said, "The main element is to bring back the forests of Aravalli along with its grasses, plants that are short-lived but have huge medicinal and food value and water plants. With these measures, the objective is to work on eco-restoration of the area."

The site chosen for the city forest is a watershed of a disappeared seasonal stream that flowed into the Sahibi river, a tributary of the Yamuna, where widespread mining took place in the 1990s. The area was later encroached upon by locals, with shanties and a marble market dotting the landscape, leading to further degradation of Aravalli land. Last year, around 3,500 shanties were removed from the area by the authorities.

At present, the area is colonised by *Prosopis juliflora* (vilayati keekar), an alien and invasive plant species, experts said.

Dhasmana said some of the interspersed mining pits in the area have also become seasonal and perennial water bodies. Due to this, conservation of water at this spot by holding the soil becomes important, increasing the potential of groundwater recharge to almost two million litres per hectare. This can also help in arresting urban flooding, especially in south Gurugram.

Dhasmana said that this project will be different from the Aravalli Biodiversity Park, with "more wilderness area with forest pathways for people to navigate (instead of concrete paths)". The

emphasis will be on the recreation of habitats, which includes trees, shrubs, climbers, herbs, annuals and grasses, he said.

“Preliminary observations show that wildlife like neelgai, jungle cats and jackals are already present in that area, but by developing it into a forest in the true sense, there could be a possibility of leopards also visiting the area,” said Dhasmana.

At present, a master plan for the project is being developed by the agencies. Officials said that the city forest will have an interpretation centre, native plant nursery, public conveniences (drinking water facility and washrooms), viewing decks at picturesque locations that show the beauty of the area, canopy walk, and walkways over water bodies.

A baseline survey, to understand the presence of wildlife and how to proceed with the plantation, will also be carried out within the next three months. However, a final decision is also yet to be taken on fencing, officials said. Areas close to the road will be fenced to ensure there is no further encroachment, but those in continuation with the existing Aravalli forest are likely to not have fences, so that wildlife is not disturbed, said officials.

Latika Thukral, a co-founder of iamgurgaon, said, “This forest will not only increase the green cover in the city but once fully restored, will be home to a wide range of rare and important plants of the Aravali landscape. It will also be an important habitat for fauna species. After basic studies of the area, we will start plantation work this monsoon itself.”

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/gurugram-news/city-forest-planned-on-200-acres-will-be-continuation-of-aravallis-say-officials-101627321660705.html>