

Construction of government buildings halted in Rifle Range wetland in Kotagiri

STAFF REPORTER
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After local opposition from activists, construction bordering one of the last remaining wetlands in Kotagiri, has been cancelled by the Nilgiris district administration.

The wetland, known as Rifle Range in Kotagiri, is said to have originally been 15 times its current size.

Due to a lack of protection, the original spread of the wetland has gradually been whittled down and is now said to be just around 8 acres.

Though the wetland has diminished in size due to encroaching residential buildings and plantations, it continues to be a source of drinking water for some of the most populated parts of Kotagiri town, with four wells being dug into it.

Local residents who had got together over the last few years to clean up the wetland were shocked to find that it had been dug up and plans



According to the Collector, when the wetland was dug up, it was found that the soil was not suitable for construction.

were being made to construct a few buildings, including a Primary Health Center.

After opposition, the plan to construct buildings on the wetland have been cancelled, confirmed Nilgiris District Collector, J. Innocent

Divya when contacted on Tuesday. Ms. Divya said that when the wetland was dug up, it was found that the soil was not suitable for construction, as it was swampy and there were concerns about the stability of any building built on the land.

K.J. Raju, secretary of the Longwood Shola Watchdog Committee, who has been at the forefront of mobilising support for the protection of the Rifle Range wetland welcomed the decision.

“Local residents have tried over the last few years

to clean up and restore the wetland, which is a habitat used by a variety of wildlife around the town. We hope that this will lead to remaining wetlands and swamps around Kotagiri to be protected, and further encroachments prevented,” he said.

G. Janardhanan, president of the Ooty Public Awareness Association, said that wetlands in the Nilgiris need to be identified.

“If these wetlands come under the control of the Revenue Department, then they should be handed over to the Forest Department, as this would ensure some degree of protection. Already, wetlands in Udhagamandalam town, near the railway station have been destroyed by the government deciding to build buildings there. Not only does this result in the wetland being damaged, but the buildings too are unstable, and eventually sustain so much damage that they become unusable,” he said.