

Delhi forest department to issue final notification for Southern Ridge protection within two months

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New Delhi: Delhi govt's forest and wildlife department has submitted an affidavit to the National Green Tribunal, assuring it that it would issue the final notification for bringing approximately 3,287 hectares, or nearly 53%, of the Southern Ridge under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927. within the next two months.

This notification, pending since the Ridge was first demarcated in 1996, grants complete legal protection and defines boundaries for forest land, thus preventing all future encroachments. To date, of the Southern Ridge's 6,200 hectares, only 96.2 have been notified under this section.

The forest department shared this information in an affidavit submitted to NGT, which was hearing a plea filed by activist Sonya Ghosh seeking notification of the Ridge areas in Delhi. In 2021, NGT instructed the forest department to complete notification within three months. Ghosh filed an execution plea in 2024, stating no progress had been made about the Ridge's protection and notification even three years after the lapse of the original deadline.

On Aug 21, the forest department said it would notify the Southern Ridge in three phases, with Phase-1 to be notified within the next two months. "The final notification under Section 20 in respect of Chhatarpur and

Rangpuri villages in Phase I, covering 96.2 hectares, was issued in Jan 2022. The draft notification for the remaining 3,287.1 hectares of Phase I was submitted to Delhi govt on April 3, 2025," the submission stated.

It said the formalities for issue of the final Section 20 notification for Phase I, limited to encumbrance-free land under its possession, would be completed within the next two months. In 1996, only the initial notification under Section 4 was carried out. Only the final notification under Section 20 grants full protection to a forest.

In Phase II, over 1,500 hectares of additional land, which is free of encroachments but currently under litigation in various courts, will be notified. In Phase III, the remaining forest land will be taken up for notification.

On July 23, the forest department stated it planned to carry out on-ground verification of 3,287 hectares of land across 12 villages in south Delhi by Jan next year before issuing the final notification.

However, days later, in a fresh submission before NGT on July 31, it said an on-ground verification would not be done and but it would instead proceed with the final notification.