

Forest divn to retrieve 14k ha of its land from revenue dept

Aug 28, 2024, 05.07 AM IST

Pune: The state forest department's local division now plans to reclaim 14,000 hectares of its land still with the revenue department in the district.

The revenue department earlier managed over 35,000 hectares of land given to it by the forest department for planting and overseeing.

PROTECTING GREENERY

➤ The forest dept's move follows a Central govt order to retrieve all its owned land

➤ The district collector is promptly transferring majority of land from revenue dept back to forest dept



➤ The latter will classify this as reserve forest areas under Indian Forest Act's Section 20

➤ The move is unrelated to the Richie Rich Cooperative Housing Society case in SC, on discrepancies of nearly 30 hectares in land records of Wanowrie

➤ It is also unrelated to Union MoEFCC's Aug



IN THE WORK

➤ Forest dept look into protection of reserve forest are with 60km of RCC compound walls

23 directive to investigate encroachments, greenery loss and land levelling in reserve forest areas of Mohammadwadi, Kondhwa

The partnership's lease agreement ended in 2008, resulting in the forest department moving to reclaim all the land it had previously owned.

built around such areas in PMC limit in the last few years

In the last 16 years, the department has retrieved 20,000 hectares of land and safeguarded it under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980. However, 14,000 hectares were pending action and remained in the revenue department's custody.

Deepak Pawar, assistant conservator of forests in Pune, explained, "When the forest department handed over the land to the revenue department, it was for a specific purpose. In 1978, a Central govt order mandated that any land needed for administrative purposes must be transferred to the revenue department, which is why we gave this chunk of land to them."

Nevertheless, a significant portion of the land was left unused or allocated to municipal corporations and gram panchayats for their use. Many unauthorised constructions have appeared on the vacant land, along with govt buildings.

Pawar added, "We will now acquire all of it back — in case of govt buildings on such land, we will seek compensatory land instead. There have been large-scale slum establishments set up in a few locations as well, which we will remove. There is an order from Central govt to retrieve all land owned by forest department."

Forest authorities elaborated that the acquisition of these lands was delayed by permanent encroachments and structures built upon it. Now, once acquired, it will demolish any temporary encroachments on these lands and demarcate the area to ensure its protection. If there are any permanent concrete structures on the land, the forest department will look into acquiring compensatory land under the FCA from the revenue department instead of opting for demolition.

Forest authorities also admitted that as a result of mismanagement, encroachers — including farmers, who have converted plots for their own agricultural use — frequently lay claim to these lands due to issues with revenue and forest department oversight.

When the land was originally transferred to the revenue department, documents retained the forest department as owners or claimed disputed status, which caused the oversight, said officials.

Now, forest officials said the department is committed to securing all reserve forest areas, with very minimal land being de-reserved, except for the 11 hectares allocated for the riverfront development project (RFD). This would expand the survey and demarcation process to all reserve forest areas in Pune district.

Mahadev Mohite, deputy conservator of forests, Pune, told TOI, "The survey is completed now, but complete demarcation is pending due to litigation. Every year, we are focusing on constructing 7-8km of walls, including in this financial year. However, we will not be able to demarcate it all due to several pending litigations."