

KERALA

Forest, Revenue depts join hands to curb illegal timber trade

STAFF REPORTER

KALPETTA, FEBRUARY 24, 2021 00:38 IST

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 24, 2021 00:38 IST

The Revenue and Forest departments in Wayanad have joined hands to curb illegal timber trade in the wake of the recent felling of rosewood trees and their smuggling in the district.

A joint meeting of senior officials of the departments here on Tuesday decided to shift all the reserved rosewood logs that have been felled in Wayanad by a timber lobby to Kuppady timber depot at the earliest. The lobby had cut 82 rosewood trees which were centuries-old and dumped them on 15 sites spread over nine villages in the district, D.K. Vinod Kumar, Chief Conservator of Forests (Northern circle) Kannur, told *The Hindu* after the meeting.

“If the logs are stolen or damaged from the site before shifting it to the depot, the land owners will be responsible for it and they may be prosecuted as per the provisions of the Kerala Land Conservancy Act,” Mr. Vinod Kumar said.

According to the Act, the “pattadars” are duty-bound to protect the trees which are government property. They would be liable for any damage to the property and if found guilty they can get a punishment which can cancel the “patta” or lead to recovery of amount which may be as three times higher than the damage caused to the government, he said.

The issue came to light after Forest department officials seized 54 pieces of illegal rosewood timbers worth ₹60 lakh from a saw mill at Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district on February 9.

The rosewood was transported by one Roji Augustine on behalf of a timber company in the district. Roji is now absconding. As the accused was threatening officials and timber merchants over the phone, the officials asked the district administration to arrest him with police help.

District Collector Adeela Abdulla and senior officials of the Forest and police departments attended the meeting.

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