

## Fund shortage hits forest conservation activities

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Even as the Forest Department has earned Rs 40 crore from Sal and eucalyptus plantations in Paonta Sahib Forest Division, budgetary constraint has put a spoke in the wheel of the forestry activities aimed at saving degradation of green cover.

This has severally affected income of Mahila Van Evam Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti, a conglomerate of 10 women operating at Amboya village and involved in the conservation and protection of the forest area around Ram Nagar village since 2008.

The organisation's concerted efforts led to dense plantation of Sal, a tree which is inherently difficult to grow and the only way to ensure its survival is to aid its regeneration.

The Paonta Sahib Forest Division has an area of 16,202.07 hectare under Sal. Of this, 2,289.43 hectare falls in Bhangani forest range where these women have been operating.

"No funds have been received since last year, even as a budget of Rs 1.5 crore was sought. We are awaiting funds for various conservation activities," said Paonta Sahib Divisional Forest Officer Aishwarya Raj.

Notably, the Forest Division has also added Rs 50 lakh to the state exchequer in the past one year by issuing challans against illegal mining.

"In a bid to offset fund shortage, a five-year management plan, encompassing protection and forest conservation, has been created. Under the plan, funding will be provided by the department and the Samiti will execute the requisite work," said Raj.

Conservation efforts of the group had helped overcome problems of grazing and collection of firewood by villagers, which had aided regeneration of forest, the forest officer added.

These women were brought together under the Samudayik Van Samvardhan Yojana for helping regenerate 10-hectare forest land in Mehruwala and to also aid plantation over 5-hectare area in 2018-19.

"Since the past three years, the lack of budget has put a spoke in the wheel of the protection and conservation work. We used spent hours daily in forest, but our enthusiasm is waning as group members are not earning anything from the exercise," said Kamla, head of the samiti.

She said it was painful to see weeds and parasites attacking the plantation and if these were not removed in time, they will decimate plantation. "The forest staff held a meeting with us yesterday, where some funds were promised. The lack of funds has put on hold key activities like the removal of lantana which degrades arable land."

Besides plantation activities, the women members of the samiti have been clearing fire lines to prevent forest fires and also undertaking soil work in the forest area.

Source:<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/himachal/fund-shortage-hits-forest-conservation-activities-616584>