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Karnataka

Karnataka lacks soil nutrients to increase forest cover: report

With the report coming as an eye-opener, it will be studied in detail before continuing with the afforestation drive.



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The study samples were collected from open, scrub and degraded forest patches where plantation works are to be taken up to increase the forest cover. (Photo | Express Illustrations)

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BENGALURU: Although the State Government has embarked on afforestation exercises across Karnataka, the state's first soil health report for forests released on Thursday indicates that its soil lacks necessary levels of nutrients.

This makes it imperative to first understand the health of the soil and refer to its health card before choosing the species to be planted as part of afforestation.

With the report coming as an eye-opener, it will be studied in detail before continuing with the afforestation drive.

Karnataka has 31 districts and 40 forest divisions. The forest cover is 39,254.3 sqkm, which is 20.47% of the state's geographical area, against the ideal requirement of 33% green cover, which highlights the need for afforestation after considering the soil health to help sustain the green cover.

The report titled 'Preparation of forest soil health cards under different forest vegetations in all forest divisions of india', prepared by the Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST) for the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD), states that levels of nitrogen in the soil is found to be lesser than the prescribed standard values in 31 locations across Karnataka, which includes Ballari, Bengaluru

Urban and Rural, Bhadravathi, Madikeri, MM Hills and Chikkaballapur.

‘No benchmark to say if soil is good or bad’

The report states that the levels of phosphorus and organic carbon is low in 24 and 20 locations, respectively, including Bengaluru (rural and urban), Bandipur, Chikkamagaluru, MM Hills, Virajpet, Ramanagara, Bagalkote and Mangaluru. [Open in App](#)

Twelve parameters were studied for the forest soil report- electric conductivity, organic carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulphur, boron, iron, manganese, copper, zinc and pH (soil reaction).

“There is no benchmark to compare and say whether the soil is good or bad. But a standard value has been used for showing the present condition. While the agricultural card is reviewed once every two years, the forest soil health card should be reviewed once every five years. This will help the forest department in their plantation programmes and the choice of species,” IWSST Director, Rajesh S Kallaje told The New Indian Express.

He, however, said soil in dense and highly vegetated forests were not studied as green cover already existed there. The study samples were collected from open, scrub and degraded forest patches where plantation works are to be taken up to increase the forest cover.

Thus, to say that all the soil in Karnataka is poor is not right, he said. X

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Meenakshi Negi, said the report will help in certification purposes and deciding on the species that need attention. This will help in knowing the type of soil interventions needed in the forests.

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The exercise of preparation of forest soil health card was started in 2019 by the Union government using Compensatory Afforestation fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds after the Centre began preparing soil health reports for agricultural lands in 2015.

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