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Maharashtra State notifies 9,800ha mangrove land as reserved forest in 1 year

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Mumbai: In the last one year, the state forest department and mangrove conservation cell have taken full physical possession of 9,800 hectares of reserved mangrove land. "The revenue department has settled all rights and claims for these lands, modified the 7/12 extract (land records) to show that these are mangroves and are reserved forests," said Anand Apte, chief conservator of forests, Mantralaya.

Virendra Tiwari, chief of mangrove conservation cell, said that since 2005, when the Bombay high court first declared mangroves as protected forests, the state government had settled all rights and claims for 1,700 hectares, while in just one year, it managed to complete the entire process for final declaration of mangrove land as reserved forest for 9,800 hectares.

The fast-tracking of the process was taken up by environment minister Aaditya Thackeray, who set timelines and held review meetings every month.

"We only ensured that all relevant departments, districts and agencies sat together, picked up responsibilities and timelines for measuring mangrove land, settling claims and disputes, checking on exclusion requests and handover to the forest department," Thackeray said.

All these mangrove lands were owned by various government agencies. "The claims were normally for right of way and water. No monetary compensation has been paid," Tiwari said. Apte added that lands reserved for crematoria, private land were excluded in this round.

The state has identified 17,000 hectares of mangrove land across the state. The process begins with the government announcing its intention to declare a certain plot as reserved forest. This is followed by the revenue department appointing a sub-divisional officer to settle all claims and rights, to hear grievances and decide on whether the request for exclusion is genuine. Once this process is completed, a final notification is issued under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

"The completion of the process helps the forest department and the mangrove conservation cell take physical possession of the land and secure it against any kind of encroachment. Once declared as a reserved forest, it is very difficult to divert it for any development work and the proposal needs to go right up to the Centre. Even to cut mangroves requires permission from the high court," said Apte.

Environmentalist Debi Goenka, who had filed the PIL for protection of mangroves, said while this was good news, valuable chunks of mangrove land, within Mumbai Metropolitan Region, especially in Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai were still to be handed over to the mangrove conservation cell. "It is surprising that though Thackeray is personally supervising the entire exercise, these agencies are still holding on to the mangrove lands," he said.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/maharashtra-state-notifies-9800ha-mangrove-land-as-reserved-forest-in-1-year/articleshow/83764203.cms>