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With Japan aid, Guj to heal ecosystem

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Gandhinagar: Gujarat's forest and environment department has initiated a new programme to restore the damaged ecosystem in the state. With the help of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), the Gujarat government will fund over Rs 1,072 crore to control the damage to the state's natural ecosystem.

Under the 'Gujarat ecosystem restoration programme', the JBIC will provide Rs 905 crore as soft loan at a mere 0.4% interest rate while the Gujarat government will fund Rs 177 crore from the state resources. The state forest and environment department has launched the project in 21 of the 33 districts, based on various assessments.

Rajiv Gupta, additional chief secretary, forest and environment department, said: "Despite the impact of Covid-19 on various activities, we have initiated the ecosystem restoration programme with the reputed agency." Gupta added: "We have initiated various ecosystem restoration activities in 21 affected districts. For instance, there will be the redevelopment of mangroves in coastal districts. Mangroves control salinity ingress and the damage to local agriculture."

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The official went on to say, "In the first phase, we have identified 11 key wetlands and started ecosystem restoration work at eight major wetland sites." He further said: "We are focusing on active local community participation to restore wetlands as we have to ensure that locals don't damage the ecosystem and become part of conservation." According to an assessment of the department, 9,179 sq km area of forest land has been affected. Under the ecosystem restoration project, using scientific methods, forest restoration work has started and significant improvement is expected in the ecosystem in the next few months.

“We have learnt that instances of man-animal clashes have increased due to various reasons,” Gupta said. “In this new programme, we are focusing on various activities to prevent man-animal conflicts. Due to the damage to the local ecosystem, animals venture into human populated areas.” He said that restoration activities in the designated forest areas will reduce the conflicts.

