

# 265 hectares of degraded TN forest to be revived

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Chennai: Several patches of degraded forest land in the state, where the biological wealth has diminished due to a combination of factors including unsustainable chopping of trees, are set to become green lungs in the next two years.

The project, which includes raising nurseries, planting saplings and protecting them till they grow into trees, will be the responsibility of the state forest department, state forest secretary Supriya Sahu said. As per the existing system, 1,100 saplings can be planted per hectare.

The project, under Union govt's 'green credit programme' (GCP) is expected to be implemented by June/July, she said, adding that of the 2,448.57 hectares identified about 265 hectares had been approved by the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) - the monitoring agency under the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change.

Funding will come from central public sector undertakings (CPSUs), corporate houses, private companies and individuals, she said. About a dozen CPSUs have already expressed willingness to get involved.

As far as the rewards to the participants are concerned, she said currently CPSUs, corporate houses or private individuals acquiring land for setting up industries have to provide double the quantity of the acquired land to the compensatory afforestation fund management and planning authority in the state concerned. Under the GCP, credits received by companies can be redeemed instead of giving a land parcel to the state forest department. One green credit is equivalent to one grown tree, she said.

Green Tamil Nadu Mission project director Deepak Srivastava said funds for setting up the nursery, raising saplings, planting, protecting, and their maintenance will be sourced by ICFRE which will release it to state govt.

Explaining why the forest department has decided to implement the project in June/July, Sreevastava said it was proposed to take up the planting after the onset of the southwest monsoon. By doing so the growth of the planted saplings is ensured. Another advantage is that the saplings are to be planted in degraded forest areas, which are free from vandalism by humans and cattle grazing.

Once the planting is completed, the state forest department will have to submit a completion report to ICFRE which will then ensure that a third-party evaluation and verification is conducted. Finally, green credits will be issued to the contributors, he added.

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