

4.1cr trees outside forests in Haryana

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Gurgaon: There are around 4.1 crore trees outside designated forests in Haryana, with neem, shisham, pipal, bargad and eucalyptus being the most common species, the state's first such census has found.

The project, for which around 150 surveyors, taxonomists and technical staff were deployed for 13 months, will help authorities make informed decisions for green cover management in the state, officials said on Tuesday. The database is extensive, and includes details such as tree species, girth, location and photograph.

It also maps out district-wise data of trees outside forest areas. In absolute numbers, most trees were counted in Yamunanagar (58,23,718), Ambala (34,08,972), Sirsa (33,18,033), Bhiwani (32,241,96) and Hisar (31,64,634).

The fewest were in Faridabad (5,72,416) followed by Kurukshetra (8,07,394), Palwal (8,92,902), Gurgaon (9,40,697) and Rohtak (9,50,276).

Haryana additional principal chief conservator of forest Suresh Dalal said on Tuesday that this was the first state-wide tree census outside recorded forests in India. "This information will be instrumental in creating specific conservation strategies for these species. The census would help in making afforestation plans, urban greening initiatives and community-based forest management programmes," he said.

But the exercise also includes vast tracts of the Aravalis that are not recorded as forests in govt data. It also underscores the pressing need for higher green cover, whether forests or not, across Haryana.

At 6.7% of its geographical area, Haryana also has the lowest forest and tree cover in India. The national forest policy sets a target of 20% for states.

Among its 22 districts, 21 have forest and tree cover on less than 20% of their geographical area. Karnal (1.8%) ranks at the bottom, Panchkula (47.4%) ranks highest, and Gurgaon (12.9%) ranks sixth.

Haryana is fast losing tree cover too. According to the Forest Survey of India, Haryana's tree cover (excluding forest area) reduced by 140sqkm in the year between 2019 and 2020.

Officials of the forest department told TOI they will use census data to scale up conservation efforts.

They have urged the govt to reserve at least 25% of panchayat and common lands for plantations. Similarly, institutions have been advised to cover at least 33% of their area with trees.

Urban local bodies will be pushed to develop green spaces in cities, learning from the example of Hyderabad, officials said. They added that using high quality seedlings was also an important move to ensure that trees survive and continue to grow.

Environmentalists said that carrying out a census of trees was an achievement. "But the state's current forest and tree cover calls for immediate action and formulation of effective policies to enhance green cover for a healthier environment," said Vivek Kamboj, an activist.