

# THE HINDU

## **Conserve natural forest at Ondayanagadi, say greens**

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### **Minister's statement on felling trees raises suspicions, says samiti**

The Wayanad Prakruthi Samrakshana Samiti, an environmental organisation in the district, has alleged that the announcement of Forest Minister K.Raju that a natural forest would be raised at Ondayangadi under the North Wayanad Forest division after felling the teak plantation in it was a part of a conspiracy of the senior forest officials in the State.

As there were only a few teak trees remaining on the 200 acres of forest, the move to fell them would destroy the integrity of the patch of forest. The entry of wood cutters and contractors with huge trucks to transport the wood would destroy the tranquillity and biodiversity of the area, the committee said.

Moreover, the rotation thinning of teak trees as per the plantation manual, was yet to be done in the forest. The mono crop plantations of the Forest Department in the district were spread over 35,000 hectares and those were set up after razing the natural forest. It was the major reason for the increasing man-animal conflict in the district, it said.

The government had constituted an expert committee to study on the impact of the monoculture plantations. The Forest Department also directed a group of scientists of the Kerala Forest Research Institute to study the impact of felling teak trees inside the forest at Ondayanagadi. It was suspected that the announcement by the Minister even before the panels submitted the study reports was a part of a conspiracy. The department should conserve the natural forest as it was, instead destroying it, the samiti said. A few weeks ago, more than 3,000 persons under the aegis of the Mananthavady Municipality formed a 3-km human chain in protest against the move of the forest department.

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