

Forest Dept. developing unique ecotourism complex in Eastern Ghats with ₹5.50 crore aid from NTPC Simhadri

Department intends to complete the project by 2025; only ₹78 lakh has been spent so far out of ₹5.5 crore

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V. KAMALAKARA RAO



Speaking to *The Hindu* on Wednesday (July 3), APFD Visakhapatnam's Forest Officer Ch. Dharma Rakshit said that erstwhile Visakhapatnam District Forest Officer Ananth Shankar, who is now on an official tour in Delhi, proposed this project. NTPC came forward to help the department to go ahead with the project.

He said some of the key objectives are to promote low-impact nature tourism, showcase the rich biodiversity of the Eastern Ghats, encouraging community participation, provision of livelihood opportunities to locals (tribals), and also forest degradation.

“In fact, ASR district has a vast forest cover compared to other parts of the State. There is a huge scope for nature tourism projects. Secondly, the area is dominated by tribals who still depend heavily on forests, there is a need to provide sustainable livelihoods to them through nature-based solutions. The local community is the main stakeholder in the project,” Mr. Rakshit said.

The list of activities that can be undertaken in the project is divided into two categories. Category A activities include construction of basic infrastructure like roads, water storage, electricity, optical fibre internet, environmental education centres, coffee shops, parking etc.

Category B activities include construction, operation and maintenance of Day and Night services in the complex. Eco-cottages, multi-storied conference hall, restaurant with open decks, theme-based nature and butterfly parks, and an orchidarium will be part of it.

“For this project, we have spent about ₹77.84 lakh as on date out of the ₹5.50 crore. We will complete it by the end of 2025,” Mr. Rakshit concluded.