

Forest dept digitisation lost in woods

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CHENNAI: The state forest department's 33 crore digitization project is to be completed by the end of 2024, but progress has been slow. A forest official told TOI that one of the major issues is lack of records.

The project promised to demarcate boundaries of all forests in the state through a survey using differential global positioning system (DGPS).

The software was purchased, but only small plots in Vellore and other parts have been surveyed so far. The survey is to be completed by 2023.

Marking forest boundaries is crucial to avoiding man-animal conflict, especially in the tiger reserves at Sathyamangalam,

Anaimalai and Mudhumalai.

On the forest department's website, you can only see four services: online tree felling and transit permits; list of tree species that can be planted; an application to save dugong that uses pictures and videos from fishermen and locals; and the Vandalur zoo online ticket booking.

Each forest range officer also runs a website for tourism. None of the services such as wildlife permits and certificates, CAMPA forest settlement, eco-tourism, licence renewal of saw mills and wood-based industries, permission to research in forests and protected areas, sale of forest produce and timber, and grievance redress is online.

"Everything is manual. Wildlife management, conflict management, mitigation measures and wildlife mortality

should all be available online as it helps in better management and conservation,” admitted an official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The official said that if the funds sanctioned were not used in time, the project could be in jeopardy as another allocation for the same project may not be possible.

Online portals for citizen services aren't that difficult to create and manage. But the forest department is yet to create a centralized online ticketing system for tourist spot.

This had been promised after the recent scam at Kovai Coutrallam in Coimbatore, where some forest department staff had run a parallel system to siphon off money.