

Forest dept to build walls to protect mangroves in Navi Mumbai

20 September 2019

The forest department has decided to develop walls along mangroves in Navi Mumbai.

Dumping of debris and illegal construction inside mangroves is an old issue in Navi Mumbai. Despite taking measures such as ensuring frequent patrolling, registering first information report against culprits, forest officials have not been able to curb the menace.

According to the state mangrove cell, there are 1,471 hectares of mangrove forests in government-owned land in Navi Mumbai.

DS Kukre, range forest officer of Navi Mumbai mangrove cell, said, "Construction materials and garbage are dumped along mangroves at almost all nodes in the city. In a few areas, people have developed concrete houses for storing materials used for fishing and farming. We have demolished some illegal constructions in the past four to five years. But after we demolish a house, a similar construction is developed almost at the same place next week."

"We were trying to get a permanent solution of the issues. After discussing the matter with our seniors, we have decided to develop walls to prevent culprits from entering the mangroves," he said.

Earlier this year, the forest department requested Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) to develop walls for protecting mangroves in an area of around two kilometres at Vashi as that area falls in the jurisdiction of NMMC. The civic body, however, has not taken any step in that direction till now.

Executive engineer of NMMC Manoj Patil said, "The project is still in the planning stage and the final decision is yet to be taken."

Another senior civic official on condition of anonymity said NMMC may do something about it by this year-end.

Kukre said, "We will see what action the NMMC takes in the next few months. If need be, we may conduct a meeting with their officials to discuss the matter once again."

Bombay High Court in 2010 said no non-forest activity can be permitted in the areas where mangroves grow, even if such areas have not been yet declared as 'protected forests'.

The HC stated that even if a mangrove area hasn't been notified, no non-forest activity shall be permitted throughout the state.

For preventing culprits from dumping debris inside mangroves, the forest department had installed two CCTV cameras near Vashi village along Sion-Panvel highway in December, last

year. No case of debris dumping was reported from the area for almost six months after that. The forest department had also announced that they will install CCTV cameras near mangroves at all nodes.

Kukre said, “We still have that plan. But for now we will give first priority to construction of walls. One camera can cover only a small area and culprits can still dump debris in the areas which are not under surveillance. If walls are constructed along mangroves, that will solve the issue permanently.”

He added that they would start conducting surveys in the city from next week. “Priority will be given to areas where problems are severe. We have understood that a few areas of Vashi, Kopar Khairane and Turbhe are in need of urgent action. Based on the survey reports, the number of walls will be decided and the work at the sites will be started from January next year.”

Kukre said that the estimated cost will be decided only after the surveys.

Activists have welcomed the move. Mahesh Salve, 42, a green activist from Vashi, said, “Mangroves in Navi Mumbai have been under attack since 1990s. Culprits dump debris inside mangroves at night. Very few have been punished so far.”

“Due to lack of interest of the authorities, culprits are getting emboldened. Installation of CCTV cameras was a good initiative. Since the forest department has decided to build walls, it will make a change,” he said.

Vishal Mane, 38, another activist from Nerul, said, “Even after construction of walls, forest officials should keep patrolling the area.”

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/forest-dept-to-build-walls-to-protect-mangroves-in-navi-mumbai/story-HIGNObHu0PDLGaIB8IWCSP.html>