

# Green cover on decline, Haryana set to come up with own Tree Act

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GURGAON: In the absence of a regulatory framework, Haryana is planning to bring its own Tree Act that will be similar to the Delhi Tree Preservation Act, 1994.

## PENALTY IN DELHI INCLUDES 7YR JAIL TERM

### THE DELHI ACT

According to the Delhi Tree Preservation Act, 1994:

- > An individual seeking permission to chop down a tree has to deposit ₹34,500 with the forest department and plant saplings. A portion of this deposit (₹15,000) can be claimed back after a survey by dept in five years
- > A civic agency has to deposit ₹57,000 for every tree chopped
- > Penalty for illegal felling includes imprisonment of 7 years

### WHY HRY NEEDS ITS OWN TREE ACT

The state does not have any formal mechanism to protect its tree cover. Currently, permission needs to be taken by forest dept, but this is just a formality

**300**

Applications to chop down trees is received from Gurgaon every month on an average

**140sqkm**

Tree cover that Haryana lost in two years, according to a 2021 assessment



At present, there is no formal mechanism in the state to curb felling of trees in areas that fall outside notified forests. Clearance has to be sought from the forest department, but that is merely a formality.

At 3.6%, Haryana is among the states with the lowest green cover in India. Chopping down trees is also rampant in Gurgaon, mostly for construction of housing complexes and expressways.

The forest department receives 300 applications on an average in a month to cut trees in Gurgaon, data shows. Most of these applications are granted approval.

Haryana chief secretary Sanjeev Kaushal told TOI on Wednesday that the urban local bodies (ULB) department will lay down the framework on a Tree Act.

"I have directed the department to frame details for the law. We will add some aspects of Delhi Tree Preservation Act, 1994 depending on our requirements," he said, adding that there isn't a timeline for the process as yet.

In Delhi, a person needs to take permission to cut a tree from the forest department. If granted, the individual will have to deposit Rs 34,500 with the forest department. Ten saplings will also have to be planted in return - five by the forest department and the remaining by the individual.

The individual can claim Rs 15,000 of the total amount deposited after five years, but only after a forest department survey concludes that the plants are thriving at the spot.

In case of permission sought by a civic agency, the deposit cost is Rs 57,000 for every tree felled. Illegal chopping down of trees can prompt a fine and/or a 7-year jail term.

Environmentalists said on Wednesday it was high time for Haryana to come up with such a law.

"We are losing both tree and forest cover every year as the state government has not yet defined forest area nor does it have a Tree Act," said environmentalist Vaishali Rana Chandra.

Haryana's forest cover is only protected by laws that were mostly set down by courts, and not the governments.

"The trees which are outside of the forest conservation areas do not have any protection. That's why they are an easy prey to urbanisation. People are aware that they do not have to pay a hefty penalty for felling of trees, so it is easy to clear green areas for urbanisation and rapid construction," said Vivek Kamboj, a Gurgaon-based environmentalist.

According to the forest survey of India 2021, Haryana's tree cover (green patches outside forest areas) reduced by around 140sqkm from the 1,565sqkm recorded in 2019.

Haryana's forest policy, framed in 2006, had fixed a goal of achieving 20% forest and tree cover in the state, but not much has been done to achieve this goal, environmentalists say.

"The efficacy of a Tree Act will depend on the provisions invoked to conserve trees, rather than setting down norms on how to get permission for cutting trees. We need to also see that in some states that have their own Tree Act, the emphasis is on the ways of felling trees and penalties... Still, in a place like Gurgaon where trees are chopped out without any valid reasons, such a law will help protect green cover," said environmental lawyer Rahul Choudhary.