

Greens demand transparency in Forest department's project to eradicate *Senna spectabilis* from Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

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THE HINDU BUREAU

Environmental organisations in Wayanad have urged the Forest department to maintain transparency in a project to extract *Senna spectabilis*, an invasive plant that poses a major threat to the wildlife habitat in the Nilgiri biosphere, from the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

Speaking to the media on Monday, Wayanad Prakruthi Samrakshana Samithi president N. Badusha said the Forest department had recently decided to eradicate the plant from the sanctuary and Kerala Paper Products Limited (KPPL) had expressed its willingness to remove debarked and dried senna trees.

The Chief Wildlife Warden issued an order to permit KPPL to remove 5,000 tonnes of trees from the sanctuary at a rate of ₹350 a tonne to make paper pulp, said Mr. Badusha. However, the Chief Wildlife

Warden was yet to recommend a standard operating procedure (SOP) in the order to remove the exotic species, he added.

While the tree is extracted at ₹1,800 a tonne in the South Wayanad forest division, the department is trying to sell it at ₹350 from the sanctuary. The huge disparity was unfair and could not be justified, he said.

The Forest department attempted to remove the trees by uprooting, girdling, cutting, and chopping the tree branches, and even testing the application of chemicals. However, all efforts were in vain, he said. Instead, multiple coppice shoots started growing from each cut tree stump, he added. Hence, utmost care was needed to extract the timber. Otherwise, it would be a severe threat to the habitat, he said.

The allelopathic traits of the species prevent other plants from growing under it. The timber is extracted in Muthumalai and Sathyamangalam tiger reserves in Tamil Nadu with utmost care and after a detailed study. They had also drafted an SOP for the purpose, he added.

Hence a detailed study and a draft SOP were the need of the hour before extracting the timber, said Mr. Badusha.