

ITC to extend support to Andhra Pradesh government to conserve forest cover

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GUNTUR: The Andhra Pradesh government has teamed up with the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC) Limited to revitalise the social forests adjacent to the reserve forests in five districts of the state. Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with ITC, the company has pledged to invest approximately Rs 9 crore over the next three years to provide support to around 1,443 Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) comprising local underprivileged communities.

The principal chief conservator of Forests (PCCF), Y Madhusudan Reddy, announced the commencement of the conservation of eucalyptus plantations in Eluru, Anakapalle, Tirupati, Nellore, and Palnadu districts. These VSS groups were established in 2002 to

safeguard the forest cover.

The VSS will actively participate in the conservation efforts, providing them with employment opportunities and wages. Over the years, the VSS's efforts have enhanced the forest cover in approximately 30,000 acres across the five districts. As a recognition of their contribution, the VSS members will be entitled to a share in the profits from the revenues earned through the conservation of these forested areas adjacent to the reserve forests.

The mature eucalyptus plants in the conserved green cover, overseen by the VSS, will soon be auctioned off. However, the authorities plan to replant the same areas with new eucalyptus trees after felling the existing ones.

ITC's collaboration will help bolster the forest cover and support the VSS in this endeavor by providing necessary materials, fresh plants, and technical assistance.

As an incentive, 50 percent of the revenue generated from the yields of these forest areas will be distributed among the VSS members, benefiting the local villages. This conservation effort is expected not only to improve the green cover but also to create employment opportunities and potentially attract industries to the region, fostering its development.

The MoU signing event was attended by officials from ITC, including the Divisional Head of Plantations and Raw Materials, Suneel Pandey, as well as PCCF BK Singh and RK Khajuria.