

## **In 6 years, Maharashtra forest dept taken physical possession of over 14,000 hectare of reserved mangrove land**

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Since 2005, the state government has taken possession of 14323.29 hectare. (File)

In the last six years, the state forest department and mangrove conservation cell have notified and taken physical possession of over 14,000 hectare of reserved mangrove land.

All the mangrove land were owned by various government agencies, including Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation and municipal corporations. Since 2005, the state government has taken possession of 14323.29 hectare (ha). Of this, in the last one year (till June), the mangrove cell – in coordination with the forest and environment department – has notified 9,800 ha of mangrove area under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

In 2005, the Bombay High Court had first declared mangroves as protected forests, giving them legal protection. However, the transfer of mangrove land from different government agencies to the forest department has been extremely slow. In September 2018, the HC had said that the destruction of mangroves “offended the fundamental rights of the citizens and hence, it was a mandatory duty of the state and its agencies to protect and preserve” them. All mangroves in the state are to be declared as protected or reserved forests, including the land belonging to government agencies, it had added.

The process was fast-tracked by Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray.

Last September, Thackeray had directed district collectors along the Konkan coast to identify and transfer mangrove land under their jurisdiction to the forest department within two months so that these could be declared as reserved forests.

In 2005, the state had invoked Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 – identified and intended to declare as reserve forest 16267.66 ha of mangrove land – across Maharashtra. The process begins with the government announcing its intention to declare a certain plot as reserved forest. Following that, a sub-divisional officer is appointed to settle all claims and rights, hear grievances. Once this process is completed, a final notification is issued under Section 20 of the Act and the land is transferred to the forest department. Of the 14323.29 ha under the forest department, the highest is from the Mumbai suburban district (3829.81 ha), followed by Thane district (3262.61 ha). Across the state, mangrove forests are spread over 30,200 ha, according to the Forest Survey of India. Mumbai has one of the largest mangrove covers in the country, acting as a bio-shield against extreme weather, a regulator of land-based pollution and an effective mechanism to contain flood.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/in-6-years-maharashtra-forest-dept-taken-physical-possession-of-over-14000-hectare-of-reserved-mangrove-land-7427564/>