

Karnataka forest minister orders special task force to recover encroached forest land

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BENGALURU: Noticing multiple lapses in the recovery of encroached forest lands across Karnataka due to the laxity of forest officials in several cases, forest minister Eshwar B Khandre has directed the Karnataka forest department to set up a dedicated task force to recover encroached forest land in and around Bengaluru Urban district by clearing legal obstacles in coordination with the Revenue department.

The proposed task force will have officials from the forest, revenue, urban development, home and Rural Development and Panchayat Raj departments along with subject experts.

Conveying his displeasure over the lack of integrity and commitment in pursuing encroachment cases to a logical end in

several cases, the minister wrote to the Additional Chief Secretary of, the Forest, Environment and Ecology Department a few days ago and directed the officials to submit a proposal to set up the task force.

"It is sad to learn that Karnataka has the highest encroachment of forest lands. At the outset it is evident that in most of the cases, forest officials have failed to coordinate with the Revenue Department to evict the encroachment and has no interest in safeguarding the precious forest wealth for the future generation," the minister said in his letter.

Pointing out that this kind of attitude is not a healthy development in the interest of the department, Khandre

said, "The loss of green cover will have a severe impact on all of us. A slight imbalance would negatively impact the eco-system. It is important and need of the hour to resolve the legal disputes spanning several years, surrounding these encroachments. All these cases have to be dealt with in a timebound manner. Bengaluru has the largest extent of encroached forest land in Karnataka and hence a separate task force needs to be constituted to deal with Bengaluru and another task for rest of the parts of Karnataka."

Referring to documentation of changes in the land use pattern, the minister directed the officials to make use of Information Technology and Satellite map inputs to record changes in the forest land.

"In most of the cases, there is hardly any provision to provide necessary documents as evidence, register FIRs in cases of illegal axing of trees, encroachment of forest land. Hence, an online FIR registration mechanism shall be created within the department for speedy and hassle-free registering of cases in these scenarios," the minister said in his letter.