

Kerala forest dept sensitizes staff on forest 'cover' and 'area'

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KOCHI: The forest department in the state is trying to sensitize its staff on the difference between “forest cover” and “forest area”.

While the term ‘forest area’ denotes the legal status of the land as per the government records, ‘forest cover’ indicates presence of trees over any land.

An internal message circulated among the department staff asks the officials to understand and remain vigilant against the ‘unscientific assessment and interpretation (of forest cover) as forest area’.

The message said that Kerala’s forest area is about 11,521sq km (29.6%) only for the last 5 years, which includes all encroachment areas, PSU leases, KSEB water spread areas, patta areas (as per special rules 1993). “A few hundred sq km increase is due to (implementation of) section 4 notified areas in the last few years. Don’t get carried away by forest cover which includes all rubber, coconut, arecanut, mango orchards & all homestead gardens with a canopy cover of 10% & above,” the message said. The need to first sensitize the staff was felt amid several “unscientific discourse going on in public domain saying that forest area is increasing which is blatantly wrong”.

“Reports that forest area is increasing are highly misleading. In fact, we are losing forest areas daily to encroachments. During aerial photography, all green areas are covered and it is assessed as forest cover. A

comprehensive survey of forest areas has not been conducted in the state. The sketches that we have of the reserved forest areas were notified during the pre-independence era,” said a forest official.

As much as 5,024.535 hectares of forest land remain encroached in Kerala, with most of the areas in Kottayam high range circle. Of this, 1,099.65 hectares is in Munnar division alone.

Of the total forest area, 13.57% is plantation area. As per records, the distribution of forest area in Kerala has been distributed in five classes. Most of the forest area falls under the reserved forest category. However the protected area where wildlife protection act is applicable is limited to only 129.027 sq km.



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