

Maharashtra's forest cover expands, but way short of 33% target

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MUMBAI: For nature lovers and those conscious about the environment, state's forest cover has grown by 20 square kilometers, around 200 times the size of Azad Maidan, revealed the state's economic survey released on Wednesday.

As per India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021, the total forest cover (50,798sqkm) has shown a rise from earlier 50,778sqkm reported in ISFR 2019.

The declared forest area of the state at the end of March 2022, was 61,907.08sqkm which was about 20.1% of geographical area of the state, while over 16.5% was the actual forest cover as against the goal of 33% envisaged in the National Forest Policy. Tree and mangrove cover, too, has gone up, indicating growing density of the forests, suggests the

survey.

Of the total forest cover of the state, the very dense forest constitutes 17.2%, moderately dense forest constitutes 40.5% and open forest constitutes 42.3%. "State should ideally have 33% forest cover. It can achieve it faster if it continues the ongoing mission to plant trees," sources closely working with the forest ministry said.

"Tree cover means patches of trees as well as isolated trees of less than one hectare area located outside the recorded forest area. As per the ISFR, 2021 the state ranks first at national level with tree cover of 12,108 sq km. Tree plantation programme is mainly implemented in the state through the forest department, FDCM and Directorate of Social Forestry. An amount of Rs 349.42 crore was spent on plantation activity during 2021-22," the survey pointed out.

Of the total forest area in the state, 55,827.96sqkm is under the jurisdiction of forest department, about 3,461.91sq km area is under the jurisdiction of Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra and 1,434.31sqkm of area is under the jurisdiction of revenue department. In addition to these, 1,182.90sqkm of private forest has been brought under the possession of the forest department. The survey also suggested that as per ISFR 2021, the total mangrove cover of the state was 324sqkm area, an increase of 4sqkm over that reported in ISFR 2019.