

Mangrove forests along AP coast degrading, says study

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VIJAYAWADA: Taking degradation of mangrove forests along the coast with a serious note, the state government has launched efforts to restore the green cover.

Mangrove forest is a proven safety shield to reduce impact of natural calamities including heavy cyclones along the coast. Mangroves act as barrier from the ocean wreaking havoc on coastal region and prevent damage.

A recent study out by AP forest department and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), found that vast extent of mangrove cover along the AP's coast was degraded due to various reasons. The study identified that reduction in freshwater flow in the Krishna river has resulted in loss of huge

extent of mangrove cover. With every drop from the Krishna being utilised for irrigation along the basin, there is steep reduction in outflows from the projects towards ocean.

“The study found that reduction in freshwater flow over a period of time leading to an increase in water and soil salinities. Similarly, conversion of coastal land into aqua ponds has also reduced forest cover. We are working on the issue not only to conserve the existing green cover but to enhance it with dedicated efforts,” principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife), Dr Shanti Priya Pandey told TOI.

The Godavari and Krishna mangrove forests were coupe felled by the forest department for revenue generation till 1972. Some of the coupe felled areas could not regenerate naturally due to changes in the topography and lack

of tidal water inundation. This scenario was mostly observed in the Krishna mangrove wetland as compared to the Godavari wetland.

“We have restored large degraded areas through fishbone canal method,” said Dr Shanti.

Tidal inundation for at least 10-15 days in a month is important for the mangroves to grow. However, siltation in natural creeks blocks tidal water flow on landward side, increasing soil salinity leading to mangrove forest denudation. The study also found that the land has become relatively elevated at a few places along the river banks and creeks due to sediment deposition during floods in monsoon.

“Thanks to laws like Coastal Regulation Zone, Wildlife (Protection) Act (1972), Indian Forest Act and other regulatory measures, conversion of mangrove wetlands for other land uses has been declared as illegal. This is helping us conservation of ecology,” said Dr Shanti.

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