

'Most mangroves and wetlands in Maharashtra still to be surveyed or tagged'

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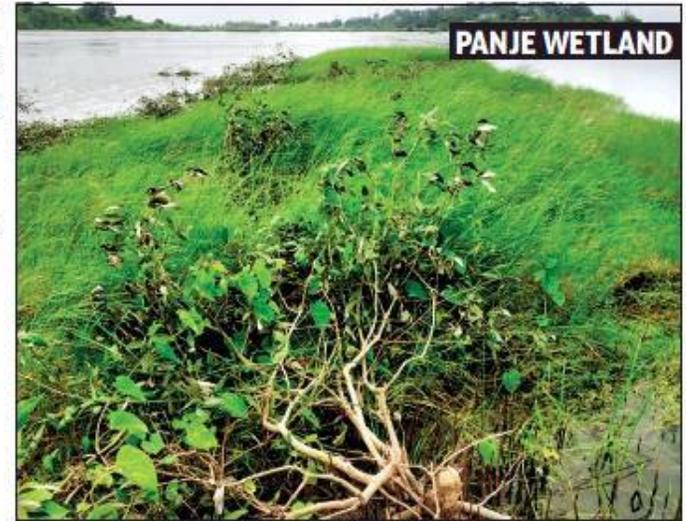
NAVI MUMBAI: While there are over 30,000 hectares of mangroves in Maharashtra, barely half of it is protected through geotagging and physical marking. As for wetlands, they are even more vulnerable to encroachments.

After a flash flood on Ulwe river at the Navi Mumbai airport site last week, there are fresh demands that mangroves and wetlands in Thane and Raigad districts be geotagged for conservation. The accompanying graphic shows four such unmarked spots.



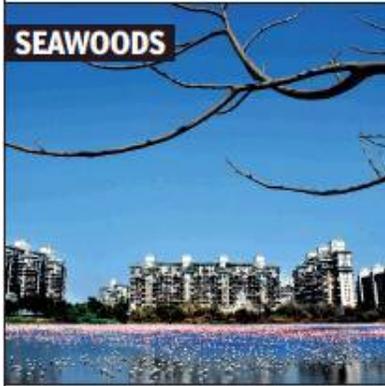
DOCUMENTATION SAVES WETLANDS/MANGROVES

- > Geo-tagging involves pinpointing exact location of mangrove or wetland with latitude, longitude
- > Coordinates, along with a photo, can be submitted to authorities as a document
- > This would be followed by forest or environment dept taking over site's custody
- > If illegal encroachments are then noticed at a geotagged site, complaints can be filed with documents



PANJE WETLAND

SEAWOODS



MANY SITES STILL AWAIT GEO-TAGGING

6,600-plus hectares (ha) of mangrove in Mumbai, according to Forest Survey of India

> Only mangroves in custody of forest dept are geotagged. Those not handed over are not geotagged

30,000-plus hectares (ha) of mangroves along 720-km-long coastline of Maharashtra

9,000-plus acres of mangroves in MMR region were lost between 1991 and 2001

15,088 ha are notified as reserved forests

6.44% of India's 4,975.22 sq km mangrove cover is in Maharashtra

SION-PANVEL HIGHWAY



ECOLOGICAL GAINS

- > Wetlands, mangroves act as urban sponges, help in flood control apart from holding water that helps fishing community to survive
- > Migratory, local birds make wetlands their destination for small fish and algae
- > In Jan 2020, state government submitted list of 15,865 verified potential wetland zones in Bombay High Court





"There are many mangroves sites and wetlands not handed over to the forest or environment departments. They are vulnerable to encroachers. The best examples are those at Uran, such as Panje and Bhendkal, and the ones at Seawoods where a golf course has been chalked out," said B N Kumar, director of NatConnect Foundation.

By some estimates, there are 130 wetlands and mangrove sites in Raigad; mostly unprotected and thus vulnerable to development. A geotagged list of these sites in a way that precise locations are logged is expected to act as a protective mechanism.

Additional chief conservator of forests (mangrove cell) Virendra Tiwari said: "All the mangrove sites which forest department has taken custody of have been geotagged by us. However, stretches not handed over to the department are not geotagged. The process and communication is on with various agencies so that ultimately all green zones are safeguarded." Maharashtra has over 30,000 hectares of mangroves. But, barely 15,088 are notified as reserved forests.

When asked about mangroves at Seawoods, where Cidco has plans for a golf course, Tiwari said: "We have asked the Bombay Natural History Society to give us a report, after which forest department will take steps."

Activist Sandeep Bangia of Navi Mumbai Environment Preservation Society said, "The Seawoods belt next to Palm Beach road is visited by birds such as flamingos. It will be tragic if these areas are destroyed. Also, mangroves act as natural sponges during floods."