

# No non-site-specific activities on forest lands, says forest panel

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Nagpur: The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), has turned down requests from states to consider non-site-specific activities and proposals on forest lands.

The decision was taken at the FAC meeting on August 21, 2023. The committee released clarification after the ministry had issued guidelines regarding non-site-specific activities in the forest areas on January 24, 2022.

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Normally, there is no justification for converting non-site-specific forest land. The governments should scrutinize them in more detail and must give complete attention to establishing its inescapability for any project in the forest area

**LAT**

“Normally, there should not be any justification for locating non-site-specific projects on forest land. The state governments should scrutinize the alternatives in more detail and must give complete justification establishing its inescapability for locating the project in the forest area,” the latest FAC guidelines stated.

Requests from some states like Uttarakhand and others came especially for the construction of dwellings and residential projects in the forest area requiring diversion of forest land. “The central government will not entertain any proposal for diversion of forest land for construction of residential or dwelling houses,” the FAC said.

The January 2022 guidelines of MoEFCC stated: “Utilization of forest area for establishing industries, construction of residential colonies, institutes, disposal of fly ash, rehabilitation of displaced persons, etc. are non-site-specific activities and cannot be considered on forest land as a rule. For that matter, no non-site-specific proposal can be entertained for considering approval under the FCA 1980.”

The FAC further observed that as per the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Rules, 2022, while considering the proposals for approval under the FCA, it needs to be scrutinized in terms of its site-specificity by the processing authorities.

Recently the central government has notified the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023 wherein certain relaxations have been provided to the public utility projects involving areas up to 0.1 hectares and areas up to 5 hectares in the Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) districts.

“Given the existing relaxations provided in the amendment, it may not be prudent for the environment ministry to consider non-site-specific projects in the forest lands,” said FAC.

The FAC, after deliberations with the range forest officers (RFOs) and officials of the Forest Conservation Division, observed that as a principal no modification in the existing guidelines is needed in view of the recent amendments brought in the Forest (Conservation) Act and dispensation extended.

