

No pillars to define road-forest boundary

TNN | Feb 23, 2023, 11.54 AM IST

KULLU: Amid complaints that those who four-laned the Kiratpur-Manali national highway didn't install the boundary pillars for separating the forest land, Kullu circle's forest conservator has written to the divisional forest officers (DFO) of Kullu and Parvati, seeking a report.

The DFOs have the task of verifying if the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) and its user agencies demarcated the forest land along the Pandoh-Manali stretch of the Kiratpur-Manali national highway with mandatory concrete pillars. The acquired land, both private and forest department's, is separated for transparent payment of compensation.

It's only after these pillars are pitched based on the GPS (global positioning system) coordinates that trees within the acquired land are marked and felled. However, Bilaspur-based Four-lane Visthapit and Prabahavit Samiti (FVPS), which works for the people that the road-widening projects have displaced, has suggested that trees on the Pandoh-Manali stretch were cut without being marked.

FVPS general secretary Madan Sharma said: "There was no boundary pillar or marking of the trees, which means there's no true counting of how many trees were cut for widening the highway and mistakes were possible in the payment of compensation to those whose land was acquired." There were similar complaints against Bilaspur's forest circle, and in 2021, the deputy commissioner concerned appointed a committee to find out how many trees were cut in widening the highway from Kiratpur to Bilaspur. The report is awaited.

The NHAI has divided the Kiratpur-Manali highway widening project into five sections — Kiratpur-Nerchowk, Nerchowk-Pandoh, Pandoh-Takoli, Takoli-Kullu, and Kullu-Manali. About the missing pillars, Kullu circle forest conservator Basu Kaushal said she had asked for a report from the DFOs of Parvati and Kullu.