

Rajaji Tiger Reserve to have 1st private forest biosphere

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DEHRADUN: The Rajaji Tiger Reserve (RTR) is all set to have its first private forest biosphere. The initiative, which was inaugurated in the presence of Uttarakhand forest minister Subodh Uniyal on Saturday, is spread across 35 acres of agricultural land located in Baddiwala, on the southern side of RTR which is home to a significant elephant population besides leopards, tigers, and ungulates.

The brainchild of Delhi-based environmentalist Jai Dhar Gupta, founding member of the citizens' movement, 'My Right to Breathe', Rajaji Raghathi Biosphere (RRB), as the project is called, intends to provide an additional buffer forest to Rajaji. The project envisages creating a commune for wildlife, forest, climate science and other environmental experts.

“The goal of RRB is to evolve as a living ecosystem, a model for global cohabitation and a small response to climate change. For now, the simple goals include growing and guarding the forest, restoring rare tree species, measuring ecological succession, climate science research, proving coexistence and creating carbon sinks,” said Gupta.

He added, “In the long-term, a sustainable forest mosaic will be created that will have at least 6,000 trees apart from various climber plants, shrubs and grass. The biosphere will have only native trees and plants of RTR.”

As part of the initial phase, nearly 300 saplings were planted on Saturday. A team of RRB visited Rajaji to collect the seeds of rare and endangered species of trees and plants found only in that landscape. To grow these seedlings, the Aravalli Biodiversity Park is being used as a nursery, according to Gupta.

Vijay Dhasmana, a native of Byali village in Pauri Garhwal who is overlooking the rewilding aspect of RRB, said, “We need richer

and robust forests for better carbon absorption and to protect the creatures that rely on forests".

As to why such initiatives are necessary, Dhasmana, who was also involved in setting up the Aravalli Biodiversity Park in Gurgaon, said, "So far, in Uttarakhand, the focus has been on investing in high commercial agricultural land with poplar and eucalyptus trees. People are not interested in developing forests which are far more beneficial. RRB will help them understand the value of a rich ecosystem".