

Prime Wayanad forest area may face the axe

tnn | Sep 27, 2019, 04.56 AM IST

Kozhikode: A large stretch of pristine semi-evergreen forests, which is a biodiversity hotspot and origin point of several springs, in Wayanad is facing the axe from the forest department itself.

The CCF (Northern Circle) has issued orders to take steps to clearfell the dense natural forests which had developed over the last 60 years at Ondayangadi under Thrissilery section under Begur range of north Wayanad forest division after the attempt by the department to raise a mixed softwood and hardwood forest plantation there in 1958 failed.

Now, the department is planning to clearfell the forests and raise a monoculture teak plantation there.

The CCF has ordered clearfelling of 21 hectares of forests in the first phase, which is part of a 39.26 hectare stretch where the failed plantation was raised in 1958. Environmentalists said that a total of 80 hectares of prime forests which developed in the failed erstwhile plantation raised in 1958 and 1959 are facing the axe.

Though the department had planted teak, elavu and matti trees in the area six decades back, majority of the planted trees perished and the area has become a dense natural forest with native tree species far outnumbering the planted ones.

Significantly, the order has been issued despite the Begur forest range officer in his report stating that the erstwhile softwood plantation has now become a biodiverse rich natural forest with native tree species far outnumbering the teak, elavu and matti trees which were planted by the department in 1958.

Wayanad Prakrithi Samrakshana Samithi president N Badusha said that the area now identified for clear-felling is one of the prime forest stretches in Wayanad.

“The forest stretch resembles an evergreen forest with dense vegetation and is also source point of several perennial streams.

Also, studies have found that the forests are home to over 280 species of birds, 178 butterfly species, and also a habitat of elephant, tiger, leopard, deer and other wildlife,” he added.

“The order to clearfell such a rich forest is an open challenge to the people of Wayanad who has been victims of the unscientific policy of the department to raise mono-culture teak, acacia and eucalyptus plantations by clearfelling forest land, which has led to intensification of human- animal conflict in the district,” he added.

The samithi has also petitioned the Union ministry of environment and forest (MoEF) and top officials of Kerala forest department to drop the move to clearfell the rich forests of Thrissilery.

North Wayanad DFO, Ramesh Bishnoy said that the proposal for clearfelling in 21.77 hectares at Ondayangadi have been made in accordance with the approved forest working plan.

“The felling of the trees were to be done last year under the working plan,” he added. As per the working plan the final felling of teak is to be done in the 60th year.

The decision comes when the state government itself has gone public about the adverse ecological impact of raising monoculture plantation and is making a policy shift in favour of converting existing monoculture plantations to natural forests.

The state government had in June constituted a four member committee headed by CCF (wildlife- Northern region) Anjan Kumar to submit report on the feasibility of gradually removing the teak trees from the wildlife sanctuaries and national park in phases and converting those areas into natural forests.