

# What are the laws preventing tree felling in Delhi? | Explained

What is the extent of the national capital's green cover? What does Delhi Preservation of Trees Act mandate?

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forest produce can be removed on any land without prior permission from the ‘Tree Officer’, even on privately owned property. The ‘Tree Officer’ may grant permission after inspection and must respond within 60 days. Any person violating this Act may face imprisonment for up to one year, a fine up to ₹1,000, or both. Furthermore, the Act outlines a ‘Tree Authority’ tasked with conducting tree censuses, managing nurseries, and reviewing government and private construction proposals, among other responsibilities. In addition, Delhi’s Tree Transplantation Policy, 2020 mandates that 80% of identified

trees slated for felling must be transplanted. However, an affidavit submitted by the government to the Delhi High Court in 2022 disclosed that out of the 16,461 transplanted trees since the policy's notification, only 33.33% had survived.

## **What is the case against the DDA?**

The apex court is hearing a contempt petition against DDA's Vice Chairman Subhashish Panda for the felling of about 1,100 trees, in violation of the SC's orders, for road expansion in the ridge area, which falls under the eco-sensitive zone around Asola-Bhati Wildlife Sanctuary. On March 4, the DDA submitted an application to the SC seeking permission to cut trees for the construction of the Gaushala Road. However, the court directed the DDA to re-examine the proposal with the help of field experts. During the proceedings, an affidavit from the DDA's Vice Chairman revealed that tree felling had already begun on February 16 and continued for ten days. So, by February 26, all intended trees were cut down even before the application reached the SC. This material fact was not disclosed when the court heard the application on March 4. Despite knowing no trees could be touched without the court's sanction, the DDA misled the court and acted in bad faith by seeking permission only after the tree felling work. While probing deeper to set accountability, the Bench pulled up DDA for not providing records of the Delhi LG's (Chairman of the DDA) February 3 visit to the site, which allegedly led to the tree felling order. The Delhi government was also reprimanded for usurping the Tree Officer's authority in granting permission.

The apex court has halted the DDA's work and directed a team from the FSI to assess the number of trees cut and the environmental damage.

## **What next for Delhi?**

Amid an extreme heatwave, rampant tree felling in the world's second most populous city will only worsen hardships. Urban forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing emissions and filtering pollutants, essential for cities like Delhi with persistently unhealthy air quality indices. Trees reduce the urban heat island effect by lowering temperatures through shading and evapotranspiration. Among other reforms, the government should consider increasing the penalty from ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 under the DPTA, 1994, aligning it with current realities.

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