

2,250 square km of forest land degraded in J&K: Govt

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Jammu- Over two thousand square kilometres of forest area has been degraded in Jammu and Kashmir even as the forest department restores 100-200 sq km on an average annually, officials said Monday.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Mohit Gera told a meeting here on Monday that out of total of 20194 sq km of the forest area in J&K, around 2250 sq km forest area has degraded, an official spokesperson said Monday.

Gera, he said, added that the department on an average restores 100-200 sq km of the degraded forest area in a year.

The PCCF was made these comments in a meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta to review UT capex of the forest department in which administrative secretary, forest and other senior officers of the forest departments were present.

According to the spokesperson, the Chief Secretary urged the forest department to replenish the denuded forest cover, increase plantation outside forest areas and repair the neglected water bodies using both traditional ecological knowledge and modern practices in convergence with the MGNREGA to kickstart a virtuous cycle of good soil health, increased land productivity, food security and improved livelihoods in J&K.

Terming forests as an important climate mitigation strategy, Mehta he said, asked the department to involve local communities/panchayats in applying deep knowledge of the local ecology in restoring their commons.

“Hailing the departmental initiative-‘Van se Jal –Jal se Jivan’, the chief secretary said the campaign has to be focused more in areas of water stress in J&K and the views of the local people should also be sought in making this programme a success,” he said.

Urging the department to achieve the target of plantation of 1.3 crore plants set for this year, Mehta, as per the spokesperson said there is also a need to focus plantation in vulnerable areas, particularly on the highways where green cover can help in slope stabilization and prevent landslides.

Mehta, he said, directed the department to restore 1000 sq km forest area during the next year in convergence with the funds available under labour component under MGNREGA.

“The Chief Secretary directed the department to repair all 3700 ponds within next six months in convergence with MGNREGA. He said repair and rejuvenation of these ponds will recharge the ground water and improve the whole ecosystem of lives and livelihood in the villages,” he added.

Saying that the practice of the people feeding monkeys on the national highways/tourist places has to be stopped, the Chief Secretary, as per the official spokesperson said the department needs to

improve enforcement thorough heightened vigil and imposition of fines to deter people from doing so as it causes unnecessary accidental deaths of monkeys.

Mehta, he said further stated that the department needs to put a high premium on climate mitigation and ensure that vehicular pollution is effectively checked and the violators are suitably penalized.

“He asked the department to ensure that visibly polluting vehicles from outside the UT are not allowed entry at Lakhanpur border,” he said.

The spokesperson said that the Chief Secretary directed the department to erect hoardings/billboards at Lakhanpur border carrying unequivocal directions from the department for the interstate commuters that the vehicles not conforming to the pollution norms will not be let into J&K.

Holding plastic littered on the roadsides and in and around forest areas as the terrible pollutant and eye sore, Mehta, he said, asked the department to mount a campaign titled- ‘Say No to Plastics’ in the media advising the people against the use of the plastics.

“Dr Mehta also asked the department to spearhead a plastic cleanliness campaign on war footing across J&K,” he said.

Appreciating the conservation works carried out in the surroundings of the wullar lake, the Chief Secretary, according to the spokesperson said the unrivalled beauty of the lake needs to be celebrated and asked the department to hold wullar lake festivals thrice- during spring, summer and autumn- in a year.

Mehta, he said, lauded the effort of the department in starting 12-day training for 20 youth of the Kishtwar district for Eco Guides and asked the department to connect them with the youth clubs and the Mission Youth for availing incentives to buy trekking gear like tents, other camping material etc.

“He said post training; these youth can use the trekking gear while as guides for the tourists on the identified trekking routes in this region and earn a living for themselves,” he added.

Earlier commissioner Secretary, Forest, Sanjeev Verma, the spokesperson said made a presentation on UT capex in which he gave a broad overview of the UT capex during the current fiscal year.

He said that Verma informed that out of Rs 90 cr released by Finance department from an approved outlay of Rs 132 cr, the department has incurred an expenditure of Rs. 70 cr till 15th February 2022.

“He said the department will fully spend the funds released by the Finance department during the current fiscal year,” the spokesperson added.

In the meeting, he said, it was informed that the campaign-Har Gaon Hariyali’ has been well received by the people at large and the panchayats in the UT are locked in a healthy competition of outdoing one another on the issue of plantation.

Source: <https://kashmirobsrver.net/2022/02/21/2250-square-km-of-forest-land-degraded-in-jk-govt/>