

## 27 hectares of mangroves in western suburbs now legally a forest

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Mumbai: A total of 27 hectares (67 acres) of mangrove land in Andheri -- equalling two and a half Azad Maidans in size, cumulatively -- have been declared as a reserve forest by the state revenue and forest department, under Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act (1927). A copy of the gazette notification, dated July 1, was obtained by Hindustan Times on Thursday. The land parcels are located in Juhu (2.65 hectares) and Oshiwara (24.5 hectares).

The move is in line with the Bombay high court's directive to the government, which instructs the latter to hand over all mangrove areas on state land to the forest department for better conservation. Declaring areas as reserved forest grants them legal sanctity, and protects biodiversity by outlawing activities such as foraging, hunting and harvesting of natural resources within the earmarked boundaries.

"This whole process starts by first declaring the mangrove site as a reserved forest under Section 4 of the Forest Act, which we had done even earlier, starting 2015. What follows, as per Sections 6 to 19 of the Forest Act, is the process of settlement of any rights that other parties may claim over the land. Following this, some portion of the land may be excluded from the final notification under Section 20," said Virender Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forests (mangrove cell).

These 27 hectares of mangroves are part of a much larger chunk (a little over 1,463 hectares) which have been brought under the purview of Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act this month. The other mangrove lands brought under the ambit of the law are in Raigad district's Uran taluka (1090.6 ha) and Mhasala Taluka (345.5 ha).

Environmentalists welcomed the move to bring Uran's mangroves under protection, in light of several reports of unauthorised mangrove and wetland burial and reclamation in the region, but pointed out that a large chunk of mangroves on the 1,250-hectare property of the erstwhile NMSEZ - which migrated to an Integrated Industrial Area (IIA) in March 2019 under the state's industrial policy -- are yet to be accounted for in this effort to bring all the state's mangroves under legal forest status. The former NMSEZ has previously been pulled up by the Raigad administration and forest department for the destruction of an estimated 4,500 mangroves in Pagote.

"NMIIA still occupies ecologically sensitive areas at Pagote, Bhendkhal and Panje. There is presently no record of how many mangroves they have to hand over to the state, as per court orders, and the forest department has not shared any record of asking the NMSEZ for an account, as they have done with the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority in Uran, for example," said Nandakumar Pawar, head of the environment NGO Shri Ekvira Aai Pratishtan.

Source:<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/27-hectares-of-mangroves-in-western-suburbs-now-legally-a-forest-101657823824924.html>