

Declare non-protected mangrove areas reserved forests, says Aaditya

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According to a satellite study of Mumbai's mangroves, the deposition of sediments narrowed creek channels and allowed mangroves to spread along its edges and expanded green cover overtime.(Image credit: Mangrove Cell)

Maharashtra's environment minister, Aaditya Thackeray, has directed collectors of districts along the Konkan coast to identify and transfer mangrove areas under their jurisdiction within two months to the state forest department for their declaration as reserved forests.

"Some mangrove land is currently not officially declared as reserved. It is anyway not developable and neither must it have human interference. Hence, we met today [Friday] to decide on the further course of action to officially tag them as reserved forests, and accord the necessary protection under the Indian Forest Act," said Thackeray after a meeting with revenue, forest, environment departments officials.

Mangrove forests are spread over 30,200-hectare land across Maharashtra, according to the Forest Survey of India. The Maharashtra government has notified 15,312 hectares of the land as reserved forest under the Indian Forest Act. The remaining is private land. Of the 15,312-hectare, 1,592.8 hectares is yet to be transferred from the revenue to the forest department for better protection as per the Bombay high court's September 2018 directive.

Principal secretary (forests) Milind Mhaikar called the move important and timely decision considering the impact of increasing frequency of cyclones, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and associated storm surge for coastal zones. "Mangroves act as the first line of defense against this while acting as a breeding ground for large marine biodiversity. " He added the reserved forest status for mangroves around Mumbai's Mahim Nature Park could prevent annual flooding during the monsoon.

According to a 2017 National Aeronautics and Space Administration satellite study of Mumbai's mangroves, the deposition of sediments narrowed creek channels and allowed mangroves to spread along its edges and expanded green cover overtime.

MANGROVE LAND IN MAHARASHTRA

HOW MUCH LAND IS YET TO BE HANDED OVER?

DISTRICT	AREA NOTIFIED AS RESERVED FOREST (in hectare)	AREA HANDED OVER TO FOREST DEPARTMENT (in ha)	AREA YET TO BE HANDED OVER (in ha)
Mumbai city	276.6	276.6	0
Mumbai suburban	3,948.4	3,706.4	242
Thane	2,062.8	2,057.1	5.6
Raigad	4,193.2	2,997.7	1,195.5
Ratnagiri	1,432.7	1,432.7	0
Palghar	2,908.2	2,874.1	34.1
Sindhudurg	487.3	372	115.3
TOTAL	15,312.6	13,716.7	1,592.8

(Source: State Mangrove Cell under the Maharashtra Forest Department)

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"This is the foreshore land which is increasing and our intention is to protect these areas, especially in Mumbai suburbs and Thane even if they have sparse mangrove trees. These areas need to be mapped jointly by the forest and revenue department and protected after final notification," said Konkan commissioner Annasaheb Misal.

Misal said all inquiries, land identification, handing over, and final notification needs to be completed within two months. "Overall protection of these zones will be enhanced when their control would be completely with the forest department. Additionally, the district collectors have been told to undertake a ground survey to calculate the areas falling under the jurisdiction of various state agencies and ensure such lands are handed over to the forest department within two months as well."

Misal has proposed a declaration of newly-developed mangrove and mudflat patches due to excess sedimentation (foreshore areas) along creeks and estuaries as reserved forests.

In September 2018, the Bombay high court said the destruction of mangroves "offended the fundamental rights of the citizens and hence it was a mandatory duty of the state and its agencies to protect and preserve" them. All mangroves in the state are to be declared as protected or reserved forests, including land belonging to government agencies, it added.

The Mangrove Cell estimates that approximately 2,000-hectare mangrove areas fall under the control of agencies like the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority. "This needs to be handed over and notified as reserved forest," said Virendra Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forest (Mangrove Cell).

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/declare-non-protected-mangrove-areas-reserved-forests-says-aaditya/story-umnQHxDtD2d5c4FEOPbSrL.html>