

Experts object to removal of cap on construction in NCR conservation zones

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NEW DELHI: Over 3,000 people, including environmentalists, have objected to the removal of a clause limiting constructions in the natural conservation zones of the National Capital Region (NCR) to 0.5% of the area in the draft NCR Regional Plan 2041.

HT on December 28 reported the draft does not mention the Aravalli and tributaries of the Yamuna and Ganga in “natural zones”, triggering concerns among experts, who say that such a move will let states be selective about the areas they want to conserve. The draft says a “natural zone” is an area with features such as mountains, hills, rivers, and water bodies.

Experts have also pointed out that the cap on construction in natural conservation zones has also been done away with.

The NCR Regional Plan 2021 allowed agriculture, horticulture, pisciculture, social forestry/plantations including afforestation and regional recreational activities with no construction exceeding 0.5% of the area with the permission of the competent authority.

“However, in the draft Regional Plan-2041, this zoning regulation has been deleted. We object to this deletion. It may also be pointed out that a similar attempt was made to remove this limit on construction in 2013-14, and was objected to by the MoEFCC [Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change], which stated in their letter dated April 25, 2014, that ‘in the paragraph stipulating permissible activities for part of the Natural Conservation zone (other than Forests and Protected Area), provisions for Regional Recreational Activities may be restored as ‘Regional Recreational Activities with no construction exceeding 0.50% of the area that too with the permission of competent authority under the environmental laws’. This should be adhered to in the RP 2041,” said a document of comments to Drat Regional Plan 2041.

Former Delhi Urban Arts Commission chairman K T Ravindran, retired Indian Forest Service officer Manoj Misra, Yamuna Jiya Abhiyan convenor Manu Bhatnagar, conservational biologist Neha Sinha, and independent forest analyst Chetan Agarwal have submitted the document.

The experts pointed out the area under forests has declined from 4.02% (reported in Regional Plan 2021) to 3.27% (as per the draft Regional Plan 2041). “Despite this drop, the protection for forest has been further diluted. Further, the target of total forest cover proposed to be 10% of the total area of the region in RP2021 has been dropped from the draft RP2041. This is a retrograde step that is contrary to the need to maintain and enhance forest cover so as to maintain quality of life in the NCR,” the document added.

Around 3,300 people have sent their objections to the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) against the dilutions to the natural conservation zones in NCR, which includes the Aravalli.

Aravalli Bachao Group, a citizen’s movement, has also sent a mail with comments on several sections of the draft and pointed out that it replaces “natural conservation zone” with only “natural zones”.

“The replacement of the ‘Natural Conservation Zone’ under the 2021 Regional Plan with ‘Natural Zone’ in the Draft Regional Plan 2041, by dropping the term Conservation’, is a regressive step as it signals that conservation is no longer important in the NCR Regional Plan,” the group said.

The term Aravalli was in Regional Plan 2021 and part of the Natural Conservation Zone but has been excluded from the draft.

The group has sought the restoration of the term Aravalli. It added it should be included as an important zone for conservation in the draft. It added the term uncultivable hilly areas must be included in the draft as it is one of the terms that covers Aravalli in the revenue records in Delhi, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

NCRPB officials said they will take a call on these objections at the next board meeting. Union urban affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri will chair the meeting. “These decisions will have to be taken at the highest level,” an NCRPB official said.

Source:<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/experts-object-to-removal-of-cap-on-construction-in-ncr-conservation-zones-101642485104692.html>