

Forest management committees appointed for hill safety in Pune

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For regulation of forest areas on hills, the Pune forest department on March 4 has appointed five Urban Joint Forest Management Committees (UJFMC) in the city. The committees have participation from residents, NGO volunteers and forest official, with provision to include ward members. The panel with the help of the forest department will soon be finalising the regulatory norms for hills, said a senior Pune forest department officer.

The recent viral video about two girls in an intoxicated state found at Vetar Hill prompted the forest department to prioritise the urban forest safety matter and held a meeting with citizens and nature lovers from various areas in the city to form a joint management committee for urban forest.

Mahadev Mohite, deputy conservator of forests, Pune Forest Division and other officials attended the meeting on March 4.

Mohite said, "We were planning to regulate entries to urban forest areas, to avoid nuances created by some people since a long time. Currently, the joint forest management committees are working in rural areas and places like Sinhadga, Kaas and Mahabaleshwar which are relatively sensitive locations with regards to environment. People participation and local representation help in running the committees well in these places. A similar pattern will be implemented for urban forest areas under the city's jurisdiction. Therefore, we have set up the UJFMC for the city."

The department receives many complaints of people causing nuisances in forest areas. The committees will be responsible for setting up norms on entry and visit timings for forest areas under the guidance of the forest department.

"Currently there is no representation from wards as the municipal elections are due in Pune. The committees will be restructured after the ward representatives are elected," said Mohite.

The committees

Currently, committees have been appointed for five hills — Hanuman, Taljai, Vetar, Wanowrie and Bavdhan. The primary responsibility of the committee is urban forest area management. They will collect entry fees to generate revenue that will be utilised to fund management activities like hiring people for patrolling the forest areas, procuring forest safety equipment. Members of the committees will also be involved in patrolling.

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