

# Govt apathetic towards forest, wildlife conservation: Forester

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Ranchi: An officer serving in the state forest department has filed a public interest litigation (PIL) against his seniors and the state chief secretary in the Jharkhand high court, accusing the government machinery of being apathetic towards forests and wildlife conservation.

In the PIL, Anil Kumar Singh, a forest range officer posted in Pakur district bordering West Bengal, said the absence of a divisional forest officer (DFO) has crippled forest management activities. He also accused the authorities of not paying any heed to his numerous appeals apprising them of the financial and resource crunch in his division, which is causing hardships to 250-odd daily wagers who have not received their salaries for nine months amid the pandemic.

In every division, the DFO is the authorized signatory for withdrawing funds from the state treasury. In Pakur, the post is vacant since September. At the state level, the post of the chief wildlife warden, the overall guardian of wildlife, is also vacant.

Talking to TOI on Tuesday, Singh said he was forced to approach the judiciary against his own government despite being a public servant because his appeals to several quarters did not yield any results.

Highlighting some of the problems, he said, “The daily wagers of the department, key for day-to-day forest management works, have been without pay for nine months. While we, as officers, are getting our salaries on time, no one is bothered about the marginalized persons on the brink of penury and barely able to run their homes. I have to face them daily being their first point of contact here.”

Singh added that Pakur, the border between Jharkhand and Bengal, is a hub of coal and timber smuggling and the role of the forest department assumes importance to curb the theft to safeguard government resources and losses to the state exchequer. “However, the situation is such that we don’t have the money to refuel our vehicles for field tours. I am somehow managing

affairs in my jurisdiction,” he said, adding that the department also owes compensation to several victims of man-animal conflict here.

According to Singh, safeguarding forests and wildlife and their scientific management are in public and national interest for the maintenance of overall ecology and Indian Forest Service (IFS) was set up as a separate cadre on the lines of other central administrative service cadres for this very reason.

“Non-appointment of officials on such crucial posts leads to violation of the assigned mandate of a public servant. Hence, I am forced to approach court to press for setting things in proper direction. Despite being a government servant, it is also my duty to red-flag wrongdoings in the interest of saving forest and wildlife,” he said.

State forest department secretary A P Singh and principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) P K Verma didn't respond to TOI's calls. Another department official however said things are under process for filling vacant position of DFOs. “Along with Pakur, a few other posts of DFOs are vacant and filling them are under process. A proposal has already been forwarded to departmental minister-cum-chief minister Hemant Soren week ago,” he said.