

Highway construction in city: 150,000 trees to be planted as green compensation

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The state forest department will plant around 150,000 trees over the next two years at different places as compensatory afforestation for construction of a 46km long Gurugram-Rewari highway, said officials on Sunday.

Officials from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) said a four-lane highway will come up from Gurugram to Rewari via Pataudi, for which an amount of ₹8 crore has been submitted to the forest department for compensatory afforestation. The foundation stone for the project was laid in July 2020 by Union minister for road, transport and highways Nitin Gadkari.

"We have already submitted an amount of ₹8 crore to the state forest department last month, which will be used for compensatory afforestation. The forest department is planning how afforestation will be carried out. The green belts on the divider and the plantation along the highway will be developed by the company constructing the road," said PK Kaushik, project director of NHAI. Officials from the forest department said around 14,000 trees will be felled for construction of the highway and as per norms, ten times the number of trees that are felled will have to be planted.

"A plan on where plantations will be done as part of compensatory afforestation has been sent to the forest department, which is yet to be approved. The plantation drive at some stretches will start this monsoon but the whole work will take a few years for completion. A majority of the highway passes through Gurugram district, so accordingly land is being identified," said an official from the Gurugram forest division.

The afforestation process is carried out through Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). The funds given under this initiative by the Central government are used for protecting the environment, compensating for losses incurred by deforestation and mining. The law aims to make up for the ecological damage caused due to the transfer of forest land.

Sunder Sambharya, the divisional forest officer of Rewari, said, "Around 6km of the highway falls in Rewari district, for which compensatory afforestation will not be done this year as there is backlog and plantation is done depending on availability of land. We will make a plan and send it to the central government for approval, after which the work will be carried out. The land that we will propose for compensatory afforestation is not along the highway, but in forest land." The official did not give any timeline on when the proposal will be sent.

Space constraint for compensatory afforestation has been an issue in Gurugram and neighbouring districts due to rapid development.

In August last year, the Gurugram forest department started looking for land in other districts to conduct compensatory afforestation on 700 hectares due to lack of space in Gurugram.

The district forest division has carried out compensatory afforestation near Morni-Pinjore in Panchkula district to compensate for the loss of green cover for the Gurugram-Pataudi road widening project. Almost 8,000 trees were felled in the district to widen this road and have four lanes. For some projects, compensatory afforestation was carried out in Faridabad district.

Officials said the forest department is not able to carry out plantation in land falling under the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA) due to lack of clarity, as in many places, private land also falls under PLPA.

According to directives of the Supreme Court, the PLPA attracts protection under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, which states that "no state government or other authority shall make, except with the prior approval of the central government, any order directing that any forest land or any portion thereof may be used for any non-forest purpose."

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/gurugram-news/highway-construction-in-city-150-000-trees-to-be-planted-as-green-compensation-101648404538794.html>