

Increase forest cover, get more tax revenue, states told

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With the 15th Finance Commission raising the weightage of forest cover in determining states' share in the Union tax revenue from 7.5% to 10%, Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar on Monday sensitised states about this crucial provision and urged them to work accordingly to get additional incentives by increasing their green cover.

States' share is arrived at by calculating the share of the dense forest of each state in the aggregate dense forest of all the states – it means states like Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Odisha (top five) will gain more compared to those whose share in total forest cover is less. The share of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh under this criteria is lower compared to the top

five.

After Ganga, 'forestry interventions' to help rejuvenate 13 other major rivers

On the lines of the ongoing programme for Ganga, the Centre has decided to use "forestry interventions" as one of the tools to rejuvenate 13 major rivers. These rivers are Beas, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, Sutlej, Luni, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri, Krishna, Brahmaputra and Mahanadi. The idea behind this move is to grow forests along both sides of these rivers to increase groundwater recharge and reduce erosion. Forests have capacity to hold water and discharge it slowly into the rivers. Environment minister Prakash Javadekar on Monday said his ministry has assigned a technical study to Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun, to assess the river landscape and prepare a detailed project report for forestry interventions required for rejuvenation of the 13 major rivers. TNN

Javadekar flagged the Commission's report for the year 2020-21 during a virtual meeting with states' forest ministers over six key issues relating to increasing green cover. Noting a tendency among few states to divert money from compensatory afforestation funds for paying salaries and meeting other unrelated expenses including travelling allowances, the minister appealed to states to stick to the provision of spending 80% of this fund "exclusively for afforestation and plantation".

The Centre had in August last year released Rs 47,436 crore from the compensatory afforestation fund money to states as per their respective shares on the basis of diversion of forest for mining, industry and other non-forest works.

The concept of giving forests a weightage in determining states' share in the Union tax revenue was introduced by the 14th Finance Commission. The 15th FC, however, increased the weightage arguing in favour of ecological benefits to be gained by this including helping meet India's international commitment of increasing green cover.

In its report for the year 2020-21, submitted to the government in November last year, it said, "The forest and ecology criterion is for the ecological services being provided by a state's forest cover to the country as a whole."