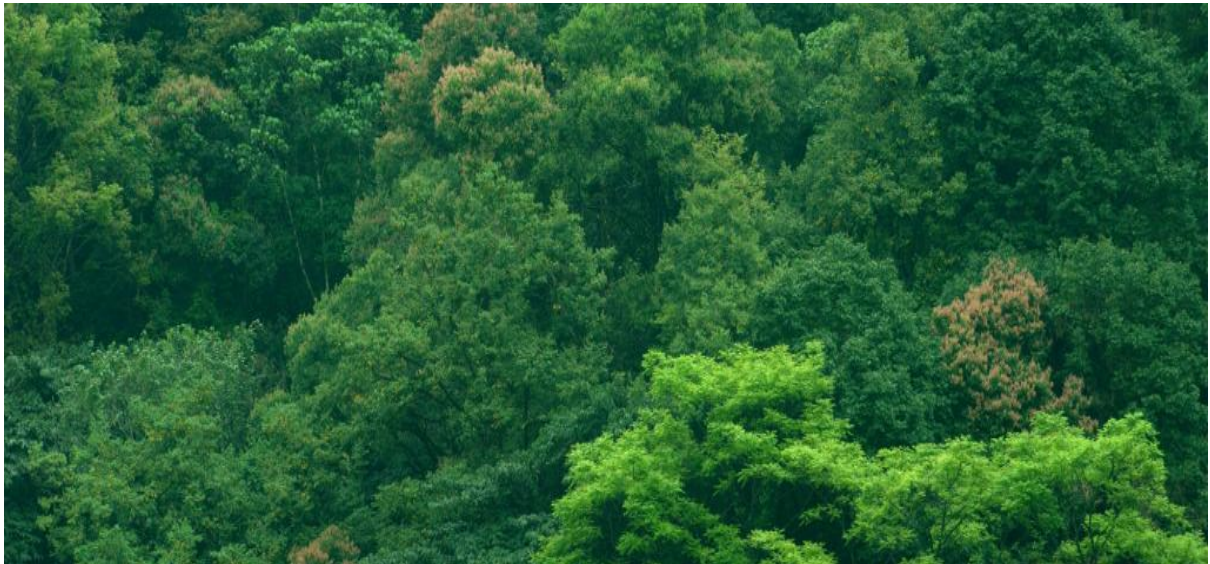


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Javadekar says 69,000 ha of forest land diverted, govt data differs

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In the last five years, 69,414.32 hectares forest land was diverted for non-forest purposes, Union Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC), Prakash Javadekar, told the Parliament on March 20, 2020.

“As per the information available on the ministry’s web portal PARIVESH, 3,616 projects involving 69,414.32 ha forest land were approved for non-forest use under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 in the last five years, between 2014-15 and 2018-19,” the minister told the Lok Sabha.

However, MoEFCC’s eGreen website, another integrated e-governance portal, told a different story — that a total of 72, 685 ha of forest land was diverted in the same period.

The eGreen website was created on the Supreme Court’s 2009 order to monitor and evaluate compensatory afforestation works undertaken by state governments in lieu of forest land diverted for non-forestry projects such as mining.

According to experts, the discrepancy arose as PARIVESH data excluded land diversions made at the regional office level of MoEFCC.

Forest land diversion cases of up to 40 ha can be approved by regional offices.

“It is important that diversion figures are reconciled on environment ministry’s different websites and include all forest diversions approved by ministry’s regional offices. Clear numbers also have a bearing on how compliance of conditions, including that of compensatory afforestation, are enforced,” said Kanchi Kohli, researcher with the Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research.

Javadekar also told the Parliament that compliance with Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 has been ensured in forest diversion cases.

Under FRA, gram sabhas (village-level committees) are empowered to regulate access to community forest resources and halt any activity which adversely affects wild animals and biodiversity. This means that unless the gram sabhas give a no-objection certificate (NOC), forest land diversion cannot take place.

However, there were several cases where there was no compliance, according to the preliminary findings of a study conducted by researchers at Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE).

The organisation studied 130 forest diversion cases of large mining projects and found that 123 of them got forest clearances (FCs). Rejections were for extraneous reasons.

“Within those granted FCs, the compliance with FRA was cursory. It was clear that when gram sabha granted NOC for forest diversion, they had no idea that they could have gotten community forest rights under FRA. Collectors certify that FRA process is complete without discharging their duty of ensuring grant of community forest rights. That’s why consents are challenged after clearance is given,” said Sharadchandra Lele of ATREE.

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/forests/javadekar-says-69-000-ha-of-forest-land-diverted-govt-data-differs-70007>