

Karnataka tops chart of maximum forest area under encroachment

14 December 2021

According to data provided by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Karnataka has the maximum amount of forest area under encroachment. In total, 83,092.06 hectares of forest land in the state have been encroached.

The figure for Maharashtra is 61,270.35 hectares, followed by Madhya Pradesh (54,1731.28 hectares) and Arunachal Pradesh (53,450.43 hectares). While Lakshadweep and Puducherry are free of encroachment, Delhi (384.38 hectares), Daman & Diu (87.83 hectares), Chandigarh (14 hectares) and Tripura (6.77 hectares) have the lowest encroachment of forest lands.

While the officials from the Karnataka Forest Department point to the state government's directive that prohibits them from evicting encroachers occupying less than 3 acres of the forest land till the settlers are rehabilitated, the Union minister for environment, forest and climate change, Ashwini Kumar Choubey, recently informed Parliament that "the ministry has no such scheme for rehabilitation/regularisation of people illegally residing on forest land."

"The primary responsibility of protection of forests from various threats including encroachment lies with the respective state/ UT governments. The Ministry has written to state/ UT governments to remove encroachment and ensure that no further encroachment takes place as per the existing acts/rules," the minister said in Parliament.

The state forest department in its report has stated that there have been 1,01,017 cases of encroachment of below 3 acres and above 3 acres of forest land over which action is yet to be taken.

Notably, there has been a significant dip in the number of wildlife clearances recommended by the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wild Life (SCNBWL) in the past five years for different projects. The MoEF&CC data show that in 2016-17, there were 126 wildlife clearances followed by 220 clearances in the period 2017-18. In 2018-19, 153 projects were cleared, whereas 71 and 81 projects were cleared in 2019-20 and 2020-21, respectively.

The National Board for Wild Life (NBWL) is chaired by the prime minister.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/karnataka-forest-area-encroachment-data-7672450/>