

MTDC to hand over 500-acre mangrove area in Manori-Gorai to Maharashtra forest department

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Rahulratan Chauhan(The latest decision by MTDC to hand over 500 acre was not included in the Mangrove Cell's assessment, and will be declared as additional reserved forest area for Mumbai.)

The city will soon get a 500-acre mangrove area across the Manori-Gorai belt declared as reserved forest, the state environment and tourism minister Aaditya Thackeray said on Monday. Two years after the Bombay high court (HC) directed various state agencies to handover mangrove areas to the forest department for better protection, the Maharashtra Tourism and Development Corporation (MTDC) became the first state agency to commence the transfer process.

The decision was taken during a meeting held by the state tourism department with the forest department and mangrove cell on Monday to discuss the process of handing over mangrove areas under MTDC's jurisdiction falling in close proximity to their resort areas.

"The survey has begun to identify and come up with the exact area that can be handed over. The total area is approximately over 800 acres and it is with MTDC as of now. Of this, some have been declared reserved forest already. However, there are still about 500 acres which would be declared as reserved forest after being handed over," said Thackeray adding that such zones would have adequate protection and biodiversity conservation once under the forest department's jurisdiction. "The land cannot be used, and should not be used either. Not all such areas need human interference. So we would rather hand it over to the forest department according to the status and protection it requires," said Thackeray.

According to MTDC, of a total area of 1,074.05 acre across Manori and Gorai, 73.19 acre in Manori and 128.33 acre in Gorai have been reserved for playgrounds, tourist amenities and parking while 872.53 acre (612.33 acre in Manori and 260.2 acre in Gorai) has been demarcated entirely as mangroves.

“Some of this mangrove area is partly notified by the forest department, but based on site verification to determine the exact area, we have decided to hand over at least 500 acre located along creek edges both at Gorai and Manori to the forest department ensuring it is free from encroachments and other threats,” said Ashutosh Salil, managing director, MTDC.

He explained that following ground verification, the proposal to handover the land would be placed before MTDC board and then the tourism department, which would write to the revenue department for final handover to forest department. “We expect all formalities from MTDC’s side to be completed by October-end,” said Salil.

In September 2018, the HC passed its final order directing all mangroves in Maharashtra, including land belonging to government agencies, to be declared as protected or reserved forests. “It is a welcome move that a large portion of mangroves will now be protected in Mumbai, and MTDC is the first government body to initiate this process,” said Virendra Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forest (Mangrove Cell).

The Maharashtra government has decided to declare a total of 1,100 acre reserved forest area with the announcement of 600 acres at Aarey Colony, Goregaon followed by 500 acre in the western suburbs.

MANGROVE AREA IN MUMBAI

Mumbai currently has over 6,600 hectare (ha) mangrove area, according to the Forest Survey of India. Of this, 276 ha are in Mumbai city limits, which have been notified as reserved forest and handed over to the forest department. In Mumbai suburbs, 3,948.4 ha have been notified as reserved forest while 3,706.4 ha have been handed over the forest department.

The mangrove cell identified that remaining 242 ha belongs to various state agencies, such as the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA), Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC), Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (Mhada), and need to be handed over to the forest department.

However, the latest decision by MTDC to hand over 500 acre was not included in the Mangrove Cell’s assessment, and will be declared as additional reserved forest area for Mumbai.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/mtdc-to-hand-over-500-acre-mangrove-area-in-manori-gorai-to-maharashtra-forest-department/story-xHRUUXtWFKmrgGYOzBFZ9J.html>