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# Project to regenerate declining plant species in Vazhachal region

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Kochi: With the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFP) starting to decline posing a threat to the livelihood of tribespeople in Vazhachal area the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) in Peechi, in association with the World Wide Fund for Nature– India (WWF–India), is planning to launch a project to promote the regeneration of the NTFP species in the region.

Under the project saplings of eight plant species that have declining population will be planted in the Vazhachal area where the Kadar tribal community has settled after receiving the community forest resources rights within a 400sq km radius under the Forest Rights Act 2006.

The planting of saplings will start on Tuesday. Around 535 saplings will be planted in the initial stage in separate habitats of each species identified

for regeneration in the forests.

Vazhachal forest division has also extended support to the initiative. “The saplings will be planted based on the habitats of each species. Most of them are used for medicinal purposes. KFRI is germinating the seeds and will create awareness among tribespeople on how to raise saplings. The residents in the area will have to ensure the saplings survive and cultivation is done sustainably. This will help boost their livelihoods,” said Tiju C Thomas, associate coordinator of WWF – India. KFRI scientists said it is the overexploitation of the forest products that has led to the situation.

“The decline in the population of these plant species is due to over exploitation over the years, habitat loss and climate change-induced issues. Species like *Canarium strictum* from which Black Dammer (Kunthirikkam) is extracted is one among the

species that has been over-exploited. The resin secreted naturally by the tree is collected for medicinal purposes. However, people used to cut the trunk to extract a large quantity of resin unscientifically. This destructive extraction invariably affects the life of the tree, and it dies faster thereby affecting the regeneration of the species,” said Dr P Sujanapal, senior scientist in the KFRI.