

Pune infra watch: Forest department seeks Rs 170 cr from PMC for urban forest conservation projects

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The regional office of the state forest department has sought Rs 170.32 crore from Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) under the joint forest management project to protect urban forest areas existing within the city limits.

The forest department has sought funds of Rs 34 crore each year for the next five years from 2021-22 to 2026-27.

The forest department has submitted a list of forest areas, including those that recently got included in the city limits after the state government merged 23 villages with Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) on June 30, for protection.

“The forest department’s recent proposal seeks Rs 170.32 crore for works to be undertaken under joint forest management project between PMC and the forest department. List of 14 areas was submitted to PMC but the civic body has given its consent to undertake work only for one area as of now,” said Ashok Ghorpade, PMC garden superintendent.

The tree census for the city includes trees in the urban forest in the city, he said. Under the joint project which began in 2006-07, the PMC provides funds to the regional forest department for erecting boundary walls for the forest area and also undertakes conservation work in the area. The PMC provided Rs 10.23 crore from 2006-07 to 2010-11 while only Rs 9.61 crore of it got utilised by the forest department.

From 2014-15 to 2018-19, the PMC gave Rs 4.8 crore for the project but only Rs 2.31 crore has been used so far while Rs 2.49 crore along with the bank interest of Rs 69.85 lakh on it remains with the forest department.

As per the new proposal, the areas under urban forest protection project includes Yeolewadi, Mohammadwadi, Pisoli, Dhanori, Lohegaon, Kalepadal, Wagholi, Hadapsar, Bavdhan Khurd, Pachgaon Parvati, Kothrud, Bhamburda and Warje.

“The PMC has decided to provide funds of Rs 26.25 crore, with Rs 5.25 crore each for the next five years, to protect the urban forest in Warje through various steps to be taken up by the joint forest management committee,” Ghorpade said.

The Union government in 1988 launched an initiative to protect the forest through a joint management committee of officers from the forest department, local civic body and villages. On the lines of the initiative taken by the Union government, the same was taken for protecting the urban forest in the city in 2006-07 by forming a joint forest management committee of officers from the forest department, PMC and citizens.

There are around 1,826 acres of forest land in the city. In the first phase, protection and conservation work was started in 988 acres of forest land, including 613 acres of Pachgaon-Parvati, 250 acres of Bhamburda forest range and 125 acres of Warje. The second phase included work in the forest area in Pachgaon-Parvati, Bhamburda, Warje along with Kothrud and Dhanori.

“The funds are spent on construction of boundary wall, tree plantation, construction of barrages and providing security personnel to keep a check on illegal activities,” said Hemant Rasane, chairperson of the standing committee.

Meanwhile, the PMC has been witnessing protests from citizens, environmentalists and political parties against the proposed bio-diversity Park at Taljai Tekdi which is spread over 107 acres and in possession of the civic body.

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