

Sonneratia alba to be state mangrove tree in Maha

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Nagpur: The state wildlife board (SWBL) is expected to clear a proposal to declare *Sonneratia alba*, also known as white chippi or sweet-scented apple mangrove, as the state mangrove tree. This is one of the agenda items of the board meeting slated for Friday.

Though the proposal must have been brought with good intentions, the move has not gone well with some members who said, “This is the subject of Maharashtra State Biodiversity Board (MSBB) and not SWBL. When there are many key issues to be discussed, why waste time on it.”

Maharashtra will be the first state in country to designate *Sonneratia alba* as a symbol of mangrove conservation and this symbolic recognition will secure a pride of place for the species and mangroves in the hearts of people of coastal region.

Earlier, Maharashtra has declared the state tree (mango), state animal (giant squirrel), state bird (green pigeon), state butterfly (blue mormon), state flower (jarul *lagerstroemia speciosa*) to highlight their ecological importance.

Similarly, in order to recognize the importance of mangroves for mankind and conservation of marine biodiversity, besides its role in carbon sequestration, it is proposed to be declared as a state mangrove tree.

Mangroves are extremely important for mankind as they protect the coasts from harsh tidal waves and save communities from disasters like tsunami, act as nurseries for breeding of a large number of marine species and help in conserving coastal biodiversity.

“Mangroves contribute in absorbing 14% of carbon sequestration by global oceans though they occupy only 1% of the area. Maharashtra has recognized importance of mangroves and, therefore, a special mangrove cell was created in 2012,” said forest officials.

“In 2015, a Mangrove & Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation was created to give impetus to conserve mangroves and coastal biodiversity throughout the coast of Maharashtra,” they added.

Maharashtra is the only state in India to have such a dedicated cell and a foundation. These efforts have resulted in an increase of phenomenal 82sqkm of mangrove forests in the state as per the latest Forest Survey of India (FSI) report.

Maharashtra has a long coastline of 720km having a typical mangrove habitat harbouring a variety of flora and fauna. There are 60 mangrove plant species in the world, out of which Maharashtra has about 20 species.

Sonneratia alba is one of the important evergreen mangrove tree species occurring in the coastal districts of Maharashtra. It is known as white chippi in local parlance as it bears beautiful white flowers.

Therefore, it is proposed to declare *Sonneratia alba* as state mangrove tree so as to help create awareness about the importance of mangroves and marine biodiversity among the students and people which will help support its conservation.