

State hands down money, several forest divisions fail to put it to maximum use

17 July 2020



Sonepat has around 21 sq km forest area, which is almost 0.99 per cent of total forest area of Haryana. Express photo by Gurmeet Singh. (Representational)

Several forest divisions in districts across Haryana failed to completely spend the Compensatory Afforestation Fund that they received over a ten year period (January, 2009 to December, 2019), despite their parent body in the state releasing the money. The list includes forest divisions of Kaithal, Charkhi Dadri, Sonapat and Yamunanagar.

As per the information received in reply to an RTI filed by The Indian Express, the funds were distributed among these divisions by the Haryana Forest and Wildlife Department, which received Rs 419.14 crore from the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) between 2009 and 2019.

Kaithal

Forest Division, Kaithal, spent only 50 per cent of the total CAMPA funds it received. According to the RTI reply, it was given Rs 3.36 crore, but spent merely Rs 1.68 crore on activities including plantation on ridge, on newly acquired area, panchayat land etc.

Kaithal, in fact, was given Rs 1.45 crore out of Rs 3.36 crore in 2019-20. And the division managed to spend Rs 75.80 lakh in that last financial year.

The district has approximately 11,000 acre forest land divided into different areas. Several patches of forest land were diverted for construction or widening of roads, fuel stations and for giving way for agriculture lands.

When contacted, Additional Divisional Forest Officer (ADFO), Kaithal, Gurmail Dhankar, said, “It is not mandatory to spend the entire allotted CAMPA funds during a particular time. Achievement of targets is mandatory. We have achieved our set targets in the last many years. Acquiring fresh land against the forest land, which was diverted for the non-forest activities, is a lengthy process. We have to complete several processes before initiating the plantation.”

Charkhi Dadri

Forest Division, Charkhi Dadri, which was carved recently from district Bhiwani, was allotted Rs 59.85 lakh. Out of this, Charkhi Dadri division has spent Rs 26.43 lakh.

The remaining amount of Rs 33.41 lakh is still pending with the forest division. Sources in the Haryana Forest Department said, “Forest Division, Charkhi Dadri, was bifurcated in February, 2019 from Bhiwani Forest Division.

And the CAMPA funds were released to the new carved division in the months after March, 2019. The division planted 7,500 plants between April and December, 2019.”

Sonepat

The Sonepat Forest Division was given Rs 19.14 crore out of which Rs 16.81 crore expenditure was made on various activities, including plantation, construction of boundary walls, fencing etc. in the last one decade.

Sonepat has around 21 sq km forest area, which is almost 0.99 per cent of total forest area of Haryana. Around 6.8 per cent of total area in Haryana is under forest and tree cover.

DFO (Sonepat) Rajesh Vats said, “Some of the projects take time to execute. Besides this, the plantation and other works including construction require tender proceedings. Such proceedings take time. Payments cannot be released in advance. Primarily, we are spending the CAMPA funds on tree plantation.”

Haryana has 21 Forest Divisions under four circles throughout the state. Every forest circle is being headed by an IFS officer.

Sources in the Forest Department said, “If the state machinery wants to achieve the set target of 33 per cent green cover, set for every state/UT under National Forest Policy, 1998, there is need to speed up various projects including plantation, fencing and acquisition of land for forest purpose.”

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/state-hands-down-money-several-forest-divisions-fail-to-put-it-to-maximum-use-6510237/>