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# State to focus on restoration of its endemic forest trees

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Kochi: The state government has issued orders and come out with a policy document on eco-restoration of its natural and endemic forest trees in place of exotic species that were planted for commercial purposes.

While the document talks of phasing out these large monocrop plantations planted for wood and timber industries, these have now become a threat to the ecology, a realization dawning in the face of climate change.

Researchers have been pointing out that these monocrop plantations have been detrimental to the soil as well as other vegetation in the area. "It is going to be a long-drawn process because they would have used chemicals for various purposes in these controlled plantations. Those chemicals will prevent natural species from growing there. So unless those chemicals are washed away, it will be difficult to have natural forests," said Sajeev TV, senior principal scientist, Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) and the 'national focus point' for Asia-Pacific forest invasive species network.

The initial plan is to have fruit trees in some of these areas. Many of these monocrop trees were planted in large numbers as part of the agreement with the Hindustan Newsprint Ltd. HNL could get the raw material for its products from these areas. According to the data available with the forest department, there are around 27,000 hectares of monocrop plantations of exotic species like Eucalyptus, Acacia, Wattle etc. Also, around 90,000 hectares of teak has been planted in Kerala forest areas.

"As of now, no action plan has come out of how they will go about it because it will be a huge exercise having to keep in mind the natural trees in that region," Sajeev said. KFRI has a list of identified local and endemic species for various regions in the state.

According to the document, this will be done with the participation of forest-dependent communities. Monocrop plantations which have lost their ecological significance and proved detrimental to the ecology will be phased out and steps will be taken to ensure growth of natural forests in these plantations.

It is proposed that the forest restoration will consider the region's ecology and the problems faced by people living in the area in the wake of erratic climate changes. It is expected that the removal of exotic and invasive species will also address the issue of exotic animals. Fire control measures will be implemented with public support to protect the forest tracts while removing the exotics.