

Tamil Nadu to have draft policy to weed out invasive plants

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Tamil Nadu will, by February, have a draft policy on the ecological restoration of its forest areas, infested with invasive alien plant species.

Despite efforts over the years to clear these invasive species from the forests, there has not been much success. Tamil Nadu will now frame a new policy to identify, target and weed out these species.

An announcement was made in this regard in the Assembly this September, and the government has now formed a three-member committee to come up with a draft policy in three months. V. Naganathan, Additional Principal Chief Con-



Lantana camara forming an almost impenetrable carpet on a hillock along the Ooty-Manjoor Road.

servator of Forests (Forest Conservation Act) has been named its chairman. S. Anand, deputy director of the Srivilliputhur Megamalai Tiger Reserve, Theni, and Vismiju Viswanathan, Deputy Conservator of Forests (Project Formulation), are among its members. The committee will consult ex-

perts from the field and get inputs from them, through outsourcing and by co-opting them to prepare the draft policy, according to an order by Supriya Sahu, Principal Secretary, Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

The panel will identify, demarcate and assess the extent of area infested with invasive alien species in the forests of Tamil Nadu; formulate standard operating procedures for removal, disposal and eco-restoration of the infested areas and suggest permanent measures to eliminate the species.

According to a government order, invasive plant species adversely impact biodiversity, leading to a decline in or elimination of na-

tive species. They also disrupt local ecosystems.

Most exotic tree species were introduced in the forests of Tamil Nadu to satisfy industrial or commercial needs. The plan is to prioritise problematic species and develop strategies to manage their proliferation. In the past, there have been efforts in this direction, but a comprehensive policy framework was never created for the same. A policy is necessary, keeping in mind the threat posed by invasive species like *Lantana camara*, *Acacia mearnsii* and *Prosopis juliflora*, among others. The Nilgiris district remains a classic example, where invasive species have overrun native species on some stretches.