

Telangana forests breathe easy

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File photo of CM KCR having a view of Narsapur forest from the watch tower in Medak district

Hyderabad: Telangana's emergence as a leader in various sectors, including agriculture, irrigation, industry and people's welfare, in the past six years is a well-established and documented fact. Post-2014, the State has also done exceptionally well not only in increasing forest cover but also in checking forest offences as is evident from the data provided by the Forest Department.

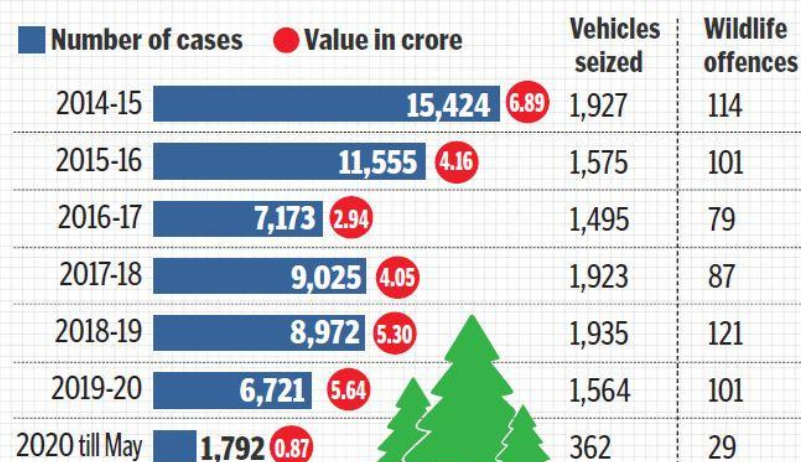
With the State government putting its foot down against forest offences ranging from illegal felling of trees to encroachment of forest land, the incidence of such cases has come down drastically. The department, which has the backing of Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao in implementing the zero-tolerance approach towards smugglers of forest produce, is using modern technology to nab the culprits indulging in illegal activities.

"Under the 'Jungle Bachao-Jungle Badao' slogan given by the Chief Minister, the Forest Department has a two-point agenda — save the existing forest and increase the green cover through Haritha Haram," Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) S Srinivas told Telangana Today.

The TRS government after the formation of Telangana State approved recruitment for over 2,000 posts — Forest Beat Officer (1,800), Forest Range Officer (67) and Forest Section Officer (90), he said, adding that the recruitment to 1,400 posts had already been completed.

Zero-tolerance approach

Forest offences booked from 2014-15 to May 2020-21



ENCROACHMENT CASES	Years	Cases booked	Total area (hectares)	Persons involved
	2014-15	421	940.735	1,171
	2015-16	192	872.423	988
	2016-17	321	1242.842	1,625
	2017-18	378	1057.368	1,255
	2018-19	668	1430.635	1,698
	2019-20	713	1308.631	1,418
	2020 till May	156	299.768	373

Similarly, 2,000 vehicles, including two-wheelers, were procured and issued to beat-level officers to increase surveillance, and these two factors helped in reducing forest offences significantly.

Consistent drop

While the number of cases where the offenders were caught was 15,424 in 2014-15 immediately after the State formation, these numbers dropped consistently and substantially — 11,555 cases in 2015-16, 7,173 in 2016-17, 9,025 in 2017-18, 8,972 in 2018-19, 6,721 in 2019-20 and 1,792 till May this year.

Similarly, the number of cases where the offenders went undetected came down from 3,895 in 2014-15 to 554 till May this year. On the other hand, in the case of wildlife offences that include poaching of wildlife for gain and also for consumption, the number of cases was 114 in 2014-15, 101 in 2015-16, 79 in 2016-17, 87 in 2017-18, 121 in 2018-19, 101 in 2019-20 and 29 up to May this year.

During the past six years, the department seized 10,781 vehicles used in forest offences and collected Rs 83.47 crore in fines.

Satellite maps

“The Forest Department, which has been waging a battle against rampant encroachment of forest land in the face of a toothless 1967 Forest Act, is trying to counter encroachers with the help of technology. We are now using Google maps and applications that use satellite images to compare the forest land before and after the encroachment. The availability of satellite pictures of the same

plot of land for the past several years gives us a chance to compare the extent of encroachment which is then presented before the court,” Srinivas said.

Encroachment

The department, which recorded a decline in encroachment after the State formation, however, also observed a spurt in encroachment of forest land during elections.

Source: <https://telanganatoday.com/telangana-forests-breathe-easy>