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How many trees in city? No one's sure

- Staff Reporter

How many trees does the city have? Some say 10 lakh, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) says 50 lakh. Nobody knows for sure.

Despite fears of a massive reduction in green cover in recent years and studies relating to the same, there is still no official record.

In 2015, BMMP had announced a tree survey, which, according to the civic body's forest cell, is yet to take off.

The tree committees, which were to be formed this year, are still 'in progress', they said.

The civic body has kept records of trees that were felled in 2015-2016. According to estimates of the BBMP's forest cell, the number of trees cut in 2015-16 in the north and south sub-divisions was 1,983. But this only covers trees on government land, officials say.

The reasons for cutting these trees ranged from requests from residents (for example, some complained of roots cutting into the foundation of their homes) to nearing the end of their 'life span'.

However, T.V. Ramachandra from the Indian Institute of Science's Centre for Ecological Sciences, who had released a study on 'Trees of Bangalore' last year, pointed out that private players were "swallowing" land owned by the government, including *gomala* (grazing) land and lakebeds.

The study had revealed how only 23.25 per cent of the land in the city had vegetation by 2012, compared to 68.27 per cent in 1973. It also estimated that the green cover had reduced to just 0.1 trees per person, while the ideal ratio is one tree per person.

Need for tree policy

In the present context, it is not just a survey, but a whole tree policy that is needed, said Harini Nagendra of Azim Premji University.

"There needs to be a tree census, as well as monitoring of what should be planted where, in addition to aggressive planting. For example, of late, a lot of *honge* is being planted. It is local and suited to dry areas, but we cannot have just one species, as it would not be conducive to support biodiversity," she said, adding that the policy formulation must involve citizens as well.

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