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Oh silt! Tree parks planned to solve silt problem at lakes

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If NGT gives the go-ahead, BDA plans to develop 8 bio-diversity parks inside Bellandur, Varthur lakes. This way, it won't have to dispose of the tonnes of dirt being removed from the lake bed

Eight biodiversity parks are all set to come up in the City's two biggest lakes, provided the National Green Tribunal (NGT) agrees to these suggestions put forth by the Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA), in-charge of rejuvenating Bellandur and Varthur lakes. Officials have proposed "tree parks" as they believe transporting loads of silt 30-kms away is a challenge. The biodiversity parks require about 68.84 acres of lake land.

Official documents reveal that the BDA has suggested an area of 52.24 acres at Bellandur lake and 16.6 acres at Varthur lake for biodiversity parks. The park is proposed in places near the main let (6.9 acres), Siddapura West side (2.46 acres) and near Balagere (7.24 acres) (Bellandur lake) as well as east of bund (5.8 acres), near Sun City (13.85 acres), near Y Junction Mantri side (5.87 acres), near Y-Junction (north West Corner 11.77 acres and Ambedkar Nagar and nearby area 14.87 acres) (Varthur lake).

This is a fresh proposal submitted to the green tribunal. The NGT had already agreed for the creation of four biodiversity parks, which are not as big as the new ones, in Bellandur and Varthur lakes, in the previous orders. Work on the biodiversity parks, approved by the NGT, is currently being undertaken near Suncity and Yamlur waste weir in Bellandur lake and near Belagere and Siddapura in Varthur lake. The suggested areas for the proposed parks, officials said, are also out of the periphery of the lakes.

We have submitted a fresh cost-effective proposal keeping in mind the rejuvenation of lakes. A detailed proposal is currently being prepared. The biodiversity park will do away with the need to transport silt 30 km away as we did not find a suitable place to dump the silt nearby.

— Dr. HR Mahadev, BDA Commissioner

"We have submitted a fresh cost-effective proposal keeping in mind the rejuvenation of lakes. A detailed proposal is currently being prepared. The biodiversity park will do away with the need to transport silt 30-kms away as we did not find a suitable place to dump the silt nearby. Transporting silt is a major expenditure. By reducing the cost, we can utilize the same money to improve the lakes," HR Mahadev, BDA Commissioner told Bangalore Mirror.

Officials believe silt of appropriate quantity from the lakes may be used for raising the height of the lake to create biodiversity parks. "The parks will act as a carbon sink, lung space and habitat to birds and other fauna and flora. No other structure should be allowed in the lake areas," the document submitted to the NGT reads.

It's estimated that both the lakes have around 10 lakh trucks of silt and the transportation work could go on for a year even if the contractors deploy hundreds of trucks.

Residents were also of the view that the frequent movement of trucks could worsen the condition of the road and add to dust pollution.

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On Saturday, workers were seen dredging about 10 feet deep to excavate the silt that also comprises used plastic materials and sludge.

The BDA has earmarked a budget of Rs 250 crore for rejuvenating Bellandur lake and another Rs 110 crore on Varthur lake, following a direction from the NGT.

Prof. TV Ramachandra, faculty at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru and member of NGT-appointed committee said the biodiversity parks will have native species. “We are also creating wetlands for the natural treatment of water. The parks will also ensure the lakes are not encroached,” he said.

Many however wondered how a biodiversity park would help in rejuvenating the lake. “There is no sacrosanct element in a biodiversity park which makes it worthy of sacrificing lake land. The BDA is free to do anything outside the lake. The focus should be on creating a wetland which should be 15 per cent of the lake area,” Nagesh Urs, a resident living near Bellandur lake said. He also urged authorities to share the detailed project reports on the public domain.

Jagadeesh Reddy, a resident of Varthur too felt the focus should be on the wetland and ensuring the sewage does not flow into the lakes. “What is the point of dumping the silt on the edges of the lake to create biodiversity parks when the silt was considered toxic and poisonous? The authorities are not sticking to the rejuvenation plan.

The water holding capacity is being reduced. While the biodiversity park may receive approval from many, it does not fit into the standard of ecology,” he said.