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Farmers engaged in conservation of forests in Shimoga district

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Chairperson of the Western Ghats Task Force Ananth Hegde Ashisar has said that they plan to take up conservation of another 25,000 acres of forests in the Malnad region. Photo: K. Murali Kumar

The Hindu

12,000 acres of forests conserved with the help of village committees: Ashisar

Ananth Hegde Ashisar, Chairperson of the Western Ghats Task Force, has said that they are glad that they have succeeded in conserving 12,000 acres of forests in about 25 villages spread across the catchment areas of the Sharavati, Tunga, Bhadra, Bedti and Varada rivers in Shimoga district by engaging farmers in the exercise.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Ashisar said bio-diversity was protected by constituting village committees comprising farmers, non-governmental organisations, self-help groups and environmentalists.

Awareness was created among farmers on the need to protect forests and trees around their respective villages if they wanted safe drinking water and a clean environment.

All forests under the Revenue Department were fenced and trenches laid. Then moats were dug and endangered flora raised along the trenches.

Referring to the fact that farmers have for centuries protected forests in and around their villages, Mr. Ashisar said that forests have been called by various names. In fact, village residents have traditionally known to worship local

deities in those areas and they would also patrol those areas round-the-clock. In return, they would collect leaves, including those of medicinal plants, fodder and minor dead wood without causing any harm to the flora and fauna.

According to Mr. Ashisar, during 2010-11, 2,500 acres of Devarakadu/kanu forests in Siddeshwara, Varadamoola and Varadahalli in Sagar, Ammana Ghatta and Billeshwara in Hosanagar and Halesoraba in Sorab forest zone were protected and conserved. In 2011-12, he said 5,000 acres of Jambani, Veera Bhandreshwara, Banashankari, Kotekoppa, Kannur, Sampalli, and Gilalagundi in Sagar taluk were conserved.

Mr. Ashisar said that 4,000 acres of forests in Baroor, Hulkodu, Lavigere, Chikkenelluru, Jambani, Guthanahalli, Gautamapura, Hosagunda, Ghantikoppa, Koragi, Iruvaki and Narasipura in Sagar taluk, Jamballi forests, Melinasampalli, Hunavalli in Hosanagar taluk and Kasaraguppe, Kuppe, Baragi, Hareeshi, Gunjanoor and Chandraguthi in Sorab taluk during 2012-13 came under the control of the village committees.

Future plan

He said that conservation of some 25,000 hectares of reserve, community and revenue forests in Shimoga and other districts in the Malnad region would be taken up. A survey would be conducted after which a master plan would be prepared for taking up conservation of forests, he said.

Asked about encroachment of revenue forests by farmers in the Malnad region, Mr. Ashisar said that the task force was concentrating on conserving the forests by involving farmers and that their efforts had yielded good results.

According to him, Congress leader Kagodu Thimmappa and BJP MLA Belur Gopalakrishna were among those who extended their support for the task force's efforts to conserve forests by engaging farmers.

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