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## Mangroves in Maharashtra may get status of reserved forests

Clara Lewis, TNN Jun 24, 2013, 01:17AM IST

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MUMBAI: The state government may declare mangroves as "reserved forests". Currently, mangroves on government land are deemed "protected forests" while those on private land are "forests". A senior official of the revenue and forest departments confirmed the plans and said the process would begin from Mumbai, which has 50% of the state's mangrove cover.

The Indian Forest Act recognizes two forms of forests: protected and reserved. In "protected forests", existing rights of people, such as to reside, cut wood, run a business and cultivate land, are recognized and permitted. In "reserved forests" the government buys out these rights through compensation and defines the forest boundary, which becomes inviolable. The latter ensures the actual protection of forests, while in "protected forests" destruction cannot be totally stopped, officials said.



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Following a Bombay high court order to map mangroves, the Maharashtra Remote Sensing Application Centre (Nagpur), had in 2005 undertaken mapping across the state, and it is still under way. The mapping and notification had to be completed within six months of the HC order.

In the Mumbai metropolitan region (MMR) 5,469 hectares of government land and 1,806 hectares of private land have been notified as mangroves. "An additional 666 hectares are due to be added to mangrove land," said a chief conservator of forests.

"Since mangroves in and around Mumbai have been mapped, their notification as reserved forests will begin from here and be extended to [the rest](#) of the state when mapping is completed," the officials said.

The officials said the notification process is tedious. "The revenue and forest department has granted clearance for the proposal. It will now go to other departments, such as judiciary and [finance](#), for clearance before being placed before the cabinet," the officials said.

The government will first have to declare its intention to declare mangroves as "reserved forests". It will then have to appoint a Forest Settlement Authority, who is generally a revenue officer, to settle rights of people who live off the mangrove land.

"Only after all rights are compensated for and extinguished can the government declare the land as a reserved forest," the officials said.

Activists said the government must quickly start the process. Mumbai's coastline, they said, is already under threat. They warned that climate change, rising sea level and increasing intensity of rainfall make the city vulnerable to natural calamities.

For eight years, the ministry of environment and forests annual report has been routinely recording mangrove cover in Maharashtra as 186 sq km despite their rampant destruction, particularly in and around Mumbai.

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P K Das, civic activist, architect and town planner, said there were several private lands that had a rich mangrove cover and there was an urgent need to protect them. Welcoming the government initiative, he said the focus so far was only on protecting mangroves on government land.

Advocate Godfrey Pimenta said the government had in October 2005 issued orders to local police stations to arrest persons destroying mangroves. "Two days ago, on Palm Beach Road, Navi Mumbai, I noticed a road being constructed by dumping debris/rubble in the midst of thick mangroves."

Harish Pande, an activist and member of the Mangrove Protection Cell, said the intention to protect is absent. Mumbai, he warned, would have to pay a heavy price for such deliberate negligence.

TOI had recently conducted a readers' poll as part of its Lead India Campaign, asking them to list their most critical concerns. Readers across Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane accorded environmental issues the highest priority.