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Mumbai's mangroves to get better protection

Clara Lewis, TNN Jun 28, 2013, 05:22AM IST

Tags: Praveen Pardeshi | forest settlement officer

MUMBAI: The state revenue and forest department on Thursday said it would elevate mangroves on government land in and around Mumbai from 'protected forests' to 'reserved forests' under section 4 of the Indian For-est Act.

Officials said mangroves would now be more stringently protected. "While the rights of people on the land will have to be settled, by declaring its intent, protected forests are be deemed reserved forests," said N Vasudevan, chief conservator of forests in-charge of the Mangrove Protection Cell.

In all, 6,135 hectares of mangrove land spread over Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, parts of Thane and up to Panvel are to be converted to 'reserved forests'. The government decided to begin the process from Mumbai as the mangroves here are mapped following a Bombay high court order in 2005. Another 1,806 hectares of private land are covered with mangroves but they do not enjoy protection under the Indian Forest Act.

The mangroves along the rest of the state coast, in an advanced stage of being declared 'protected forests', will be processed directly for declaration as 'reserved forests'. The state, for eight years, has a declared mangrove cover of 186 sq km, most of which is government land. Forest department officials said the mapping is yet to be completed.



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Praveen Pardeshi, principal secretary (revenue & forests), said mangroves contiguous up to five hectares will be notified 'reserved forests'. An official said it would apply to new proposals.

To be converted from 'protected' to 'reserved forests', rights of people living off the land have to be settled. The revenue department will appoint a forest settlement officer to hold hearings and decide on claims and rights of those residing, cultivating, felling wood or conducting business on the land. D Stalin, director of the Vanshakti NGO, said if the government strictly implemented the coastal regulation zone notification, mangroves could be easily saved.

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