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Mangrove patch served to salt makers

Himanshu Kaushik, TNN Jun 24, 2013, 02:31AM IST

Tags: Supreme Court | salt makers | Mangrove patch | Kutch collector

AHMEDABAD: Despite opposition from senior forest officials, the state revenue department has de-reserved a patch of a mangrove forest and is ready to hand over the land to salt makers. The department has ignored the Indian Forest Act and has de-reserved the patch to give the land to two salt manufacturing units on lease.

Officials said that an area of 7,770 hectare of dense mangrove forest was reserved as forest area in 1980. In 2009, a move was started to de-reserve this forest. It was in March 2010, that the deputy conservator of forest (DCF) wrote a letter to the collector in Kutch requesting him to cancel the lease given to a salt manufacturing company. The DCF in the letter dated March 25, 2010 said he had sought details of the order of the collectorate dated September 19, 2009, but the details had not been provided to the forest department. The DCF L J Parmar has said that granting lease in the area reserved as forest was not only violating the Forest act, but was also against the Supreme Court order in the petition 202/95 filed by one TN Godavarman Thirumulkpad versus Union of India and others.

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The order states "In view of the meaning of the word 'forest' in the Act, it is obvious that prior approval of the Central government is required for any non-forest activity within the area of any "forest". In accordance with Section 2 of the Act, all on-going activity within any forest in any state throughout the country, without the prior approval of the Central government, must cease forthwith."

Parmar in the letter said that the area was a reserved mangrove forest and hence could not be given to any company. This will cause major damage to the mangrove plantation. Parmar has in his letter even gone to the extent of saying that the decision amounts to contempt of the apex court.

G P Patel, former principal chief conservator of forest says "Information gathered through the RTI states that after Parmar raised the objection; the revenue department of the Kutch collector ordered a resurvey and in order to benefit the salt manufacturers, made alterations in the boundary of the forest area and de-reserved the dense mangrove area." Patel said that certain senior level forest officials were involved in the de-reserving too. Legal opinion is now being sought and options to challenge the decision to de-reserve the forest is being explored.

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