

Delhi government goes digital to monitor forest land

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Written by Aneesha Mathur

New Delhi Aug 23, 2015



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In a bid to set up an “online monitoring system” for the “protection and management” of forests, the Delhi government’s forest department has begun using GPS-enabled camera phones and other such devices to monitor reserve forest areas in the city.

In its affidavit filed before the Delhi High Court on Friday, the department has stated that there is “more impetus being given to technological improvement now” which would “not only improve the quality of forests” but also “provide quick detection of unauthorised activities”.

The affidavit was filed after the High Court bench of justices B D Ahmed and Sanjeev Sachdeva had asked the department for geospatial maps of the forest cover in Delhi, after amicus curiae and senior advocate Kailash Vasdev

alleged that the government’s estimates of “forest” cover had included public parks and encroached areas. The bench had asked the government to verify the extent of forest cover in the city. The department has submitted maps prepared by Geospatial Delhi Ltd (GDSL) in 2008 and 2011, and has also informed the court that it has written to the GDSL to provide maps for 2008, 2012, and 2014-15 for a proper comparative analysis. The department has also claimed that green cover in the capital had increased from 5.93 per cent in 1999 to 20.8 per cent in 2013 due to “plantation activities” by the department through various agencies. In the affidavit, the department has also given details of encroachments on the southern Ridge protected forest area — including Asola Bhatti sanctuary, Aya Nagar and Chhatarpur. As per the data, the notified forest areas have illegal farmhouses, unauthorised colonies, JJ clusters and roads encroaching into the forestland. But the department has cautioned that some of the encroachments may be from before the areas were notified as a protected forest.

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