

Forest dept's policy for pvt forest management sent to AG, CM

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Panaji: The forest department has put in place a policy for private forest management and the process for identification of private forest is now going on, environment and forest minister Alina Saldanha told TOI. Saldanha said that the work of identification of private forests in Goa is going on through two committees in either district in Goa. The North Goa committee is headed by V T Thomas and the South Goa committee is headed by F X Araujo. Both are retired forest department officials and the work has been going on for the last two years.

The work of these committees was delayed due to lack of land surveyors. The forest department has now floated tenders for appointing surveyors, Saldanha said. She also said that the policy for management of private forests has been forwarded to the advocate general for vetting with a copy to the chief minister. Once it is approved, it will be put in the public domain for suggestions and objections and later notified. Asked for the salient features of the policy, Saldanha said that it contains certain facilities and privileges for the owners of the land whereby they will be allowed plantation, construction for family needs or for eco-tourism activities. She said full details of the policy will be known once it is put in the public domain for suggestions and objections.

Saldanha said that the criteria for identification of private forests is as follows; 75% of the tree composition should be of forestry species; the area should be contiguous to the government forest and if in isolation, the minimum area should be five hectare; the canopy density should not be less than 0.4. The methodology for identification of private forests is diverse. One is reconnaissance survey of the prospective private forest areas; actual detailed inspections of the vegetation within the prospective areas by the committee and, ground survey and demarcation of the vegetation identified as private by the land surveyors.

The issue of identification of private forests in Goa actually dates back to January 24, 1997, when the Sawant committee was first constituted to identify private forests in Goa. Subsequently, the Karapur committee was appointed and it submitted its report in 2000-2001. But some developments later and the intervention of the Goa Foundation, the matter now rests before the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

Once the NGT gives clearance to the state government's final report dated June 30, 2008, the areas identified by the Sawant and Karapur committee reports and other areas which the latter committees come out with after proper individual ground survey and mapping shall have to be notified by the state government and incorporated into the state's revenue records and survey records, subject to acceptance by the state government.

Source: THE TIMES OF INDIA, GOA .