

Stripped of half its forest cover, Visakhapatnam district plans afforestation drive

Venkatesh Bayya, TNN | Jun 1, 2015, 06.29AM IST



VISAKHAPATNAM: On paper, Visakhapatnam district boasts of close to 11 lakh acres of forest land, but in reality nearly 50% of this area has, over the last 35 years, been lost to rapid urbanization, the practice of shifting cultivation and illegal felling of trees. According to forest department officials, these have also led to the failure of afforestation efforts in these areas.

Vizag district forest officer (DFO) P Ram Mohan told TOI that the district administration is now planning to launch an integrated action plan (IAP) to replant close to 5 lakh acres in the three divisions of Visakhapatnam, Narsipatnam and Paderu.

"The integrated action plan is about developing water harvesting projects, soil rejuvenation and planting of trees native to the region. The collector is keen on this project, which will cover even those areas that have been identified as compensatory forest cover for land that is being de-notified and handed over for infrastructure development. More than 18 blocks of land have been identified in the three divisions as compensatory forest cover extending over 1,900 plus hectares, with the maximum being in

Narsipatnam. However, once the blocks are finalised, we wish to initiate the IAP," Ram Mohan said.

"The outlay of the plan is for five years and we intend to cover 20% of the denuded blocks in the next five years," said the DFO. He explained that on an average, 4% of the denuded forest land will be covered each year, which works out to nearly 20,000 acres per annum at an average cost of Rs 20 crore per annum.

However, the DFO said the project would be a tough task as most of the denuded area is turning into desert land because of erosion of the top soil and drying up of water holes. "This is an acute problem, especially in Paderu and Narsipatnam zones. In these two areas, grazing and excessive shifting cultivation has destroyed the soil. Several soil conservation experts pointed out that even the tribals abandoned these blocks deeming them unfit for cultivation. In such a scenario, it will take years of care and efforts to regrow the natural forest," he said.

District collector N Yuvaraj said the afforestation programme in the district will be conducted with the help of various departments and local groups. "We need to understand that re-forestation or water harvesting programmes must benefit the people, especially those inhabiting these areas. Nothing can be achieved without engaging the local people."

Source:

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/visakhapatnam/Stripped-of-half-its-forest-cover-Visakhapatnam-district-plans-afforestation-drive/articleshow/47494964.cms>