

# NEELAKURINJI SANCTUARY STAYS ON PAPER

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Though Neelakurinji is on the list of protected plants, the proposal for a Neelakurinji sanctuary remains a distant dream. [File](#) | [Photo Credit: The Hindu](#)

Though the [Union government has included Neelakurinji \(Strobilanthes kunthiana\) on the list of protected plants](#) from the State, the proposal for a Neelakurinji sanctuary in Idukki still remains a distant dream.

On October 6, 2006, former forest minister Benoy Viswom had announced a 32-sq km Neelakurinji sanctuary at the Kottakamboor-Vattavada area in Devikulam taluk, Munnar. The park aimed at protecting Neelakurinji plants. But after 16 years, the proposed sanctuary is still on paper.

Certain portions (58 and 62 blocks) in the Vattavada panchayat have been included in the sanctuary. The residents are unable to even procure possession certificates for their lands. Vattavada panchayat vice-president K. Velayudhan said that the delay in fixing the sanctuary's boundaries had impacted the lives of the local residents. "On Friday, we met the Devikulam Subcollector, who is also the settlement officer of the proposed sanctuary. The official said that without a government order, he cannot begin the settlement process, which is the demarcation of the sanctuary area and human habitations. Without fixing the boundaries, we can't finalise the buffer zone boundaries in the panchayat. The settlement officer must complete the process immediately," said Mr. Velayudhan.

K. Jayaprakash, a resident of Vattavada, said the farmers had been living in the village for hundreds of years. "As per the government order, the proposed sanctuary is in 3,200 hectares of land. But, the actual area is only around some 2,900 hectares," said Mr. Jayaprakash.

Devikulam Subcollector Rahul Krishna Sharma said a government order was still pending, and hence delay in the settlement process. "To start the process, the government should issue an order for empowering an official to conduct the settlement process. I hope the order will be issued soon," said Mr. Krishna Sharma.

A Forest department official said that the sanctuary was a continuum of the Neelakurinji plants from the Eravikulam National Park. "Neelakurinji plants are largely found in the proposed sanctuary area, and the area must be protected," said the official.

In December 2017, a three-member ministerial committee of former ministers K. Raju, E.

Chandrasekharan, and M.M. Mani visited the Kadavari area of the proposed sanctuary and listened to complaints and suggestions from local people. After five years, the process is still pending.

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