TELANGANA TOPS THE COUNTRY IN DEFORESTATION BY PERMITTING AXING OF OVER 12 LAKH TREES BY 2020

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

To enjoy additional benefits

CONNECT WITH US

January 26, 2024 09:26 pm | Updated January 27, 2024 02:15 am IST - HYDERABAD

COMMents

SHARE

READ LATER

Trees being cut for road widening in Khammam. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The Telangana State has permitted record deforestation by way of clearances for various government and non-government projects since the formation of the separate State.

Notwithstanding its afforestation claims under the Telangana Ku Haritha Haram programme, the State Forest department has earned the dubious distinction of allowing the felling of more than 12 lakh trees — which was the highest in the country — in just over five years into the State formation.

It was admitted by none other than the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) R. Sobha in an affidavit submitted to the High Court, in response to a Public Interest Litigation in 2020.

In the counter, the forest official, who was later re-appointed as the Advisor, Forestry, admitted that a total 12,12,753 trees were allowed to be cut during the previous five years, and that it was the highest in the whole country.

She, however, sought to justify the clearances, saying that the trees were sparsely spread over 11,717 hectares of forest land diverted for various non-forestry purposes. On an average, the trees felled numbered at 104 per hectare of land, which amounted to less than 0.4 (or 40%) canopy density. The trees were all grown up with trunk girth of over 30 centimetres.

By way of the permissions, the department had earned 2058 crore, which was deposited in the account of the Telangana State's Adhoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority. The amount was being used for taking up afforestation and wildlife habitat improvement, the counter said.

The PIL was filed against the government's decision to divert forest land in Damagundam near Pudur of Vikarabad district to the tune of 1174 hectares (2,900 acres) for the establishment of Very Low Frequency (VLF) communications station by the Indian Navy's Eastern Naval Command. The project has received a go ahead recently, after the High Court has vacated the

stay.

The radar transmission system being set up for marine/submarine communication could result in more deforestation in the State which has already lost much of its forest extent, the petitioner representing the 'Damagunda Forest Protection JAC-Save Damagundam', a registered society contended.

Defending the diversion, Sobha said 1,500 acres of the forest will be maintained as green belt and trees would not be felled here. The canopy density is less than 0.4 in the region, she said. As per the inventory carried out by the State Forest department, she mentioned, 0.4 density amounted to an average 176 trees per hectare. Even by this estimation, tree felling in the non-green-belt area would amount to a lakh fully grown trees. These are apart from more than 5.5 lakh plants of more than half a metre height.

"In these days of modern technology, the Navy can explore other options. Is it worth losing so much greenery in these days of climate change? The station will have officers and staff, they need residential complexes, schools for their children, and other facilities. Eventually, the whole forest area will be gone," said Challa Ram Kalyan, an advocate who floated an online petition against the proposal.

Proposal to establish the communication centre was mooted in 2010, and permission was granted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in 2017. The proposal had been processed offline as it is of strategic importance, the affidavit mentioned.

COMMents

SHARE

BACK TO TOP

END