

'DO FOREST SURVEYS SEPARATELY'

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

A high-power committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has recommended that forest surveys — the biennial exercise by the government to estimate forest cover — explicitly demarcate trees grown in forests from those grown outside, that is, in plantations and private lands.

Currently, the government counts both towards estimating the portion of India's geographical area covered by forest.

Independent critics have for long pointed out that including both isn't an ecologically sound principle but this is a first instance of government-constituted committee recommending so.

India posted a marginal 0.21% rise in the area under forest between 2015 and 2017, according to the India State of Forest Report (SFR) 2017, which was made public in February 2018.

The document says that India has about 7,08,273 sq. km. of forest, which is 21.53% of the geographic area of the country (32,87,569 sq. km.).

Getting India to have at least 33% of its area under forest has been a long-standing goal of the government since 1988.

Various editions of the SFR have over the years reported the area under forests as hovering around 21%. So the government also includes substantial patches of trees outside areas designated as forests, such as plantations or greenlands, in its assessment.

Tree cover

The total tree cover, according to this assessment, was 93,815 sq. km. or a 2% rise from the approximately 92,500 sq. km. in 2015.

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