

Over 2,500 ha Forest Land Diverted Across Country

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) in its recent meeting discussed the diversion of more than 2,500 hectares of forest land in the country. While the maximum diversion of above 1,300 hectares is from Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand for reservoirs, submersible canals and dams, other projects discussed include solar power, roads, mining and others.

According to available documents, the highest diversion is likely to be in Andhra Pradesh, seeking 1,016 ha of forest land for foreshore submersion and excavation of canals to State Government in the forest divisions of Proddatur, Kadapa, Rajampet & Nellore Divisions in Nellore District in the State of Andhra Pradesh. These areas happen to be integral part of Penusila Narasimha Swamy Wild Life Sanctuary in the State.

The site inspection report further states that these areas have wildlife including panther, sambar, spotted deer, wild boar, rabbits, jungle cat, jungle fowl, bear, wild dog, wolf, jackal, wild cat, wild pig, etc. More than 5,000 trees would be felled in the process.

The project proponents shall be provided for penal Compensatory Afforestation along with the cost of afforestation and maintenance. Bridges will be constructed for the smooth movement of the animals across the canals, wherever required in consultation with the local DFO. Ramps shall be provided at selected places in consultation with the DFO to facilitate animal movement for drinking water.

In Uttarakhand FAC reviewed the diversion of 381.43 ha of forest land for construction of dam in Nainital district by the State water resources department.

After irrigation projects jointly put together, the next highest diversion of 517.8 hectares is in Odisha in favour of Odisha Mining Corporation for mining of iron ore and manganese under Bonai Forest Division in Sundergarh district. According to the report, the area though not a part of protected area is home to barking deer, rabbit, Bear, jackal and mongoose.

Nearly 120 hectares of land will also be diverted for solar power in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Nearly 60.63 ha of reserve forest land is for construction of wind power project by M/s Suzlon Energy Ltd the district of Nasik in Maharashtra.

According to sources, the proposed project has been recommended for rejection by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Maharashtra. He has pointed out that the proposal envisages construction of about 16.5 Km long road, for which 47.7 ha of forest area is required out of a total of area, of forest land that is needed for the project. "Thus 72% of forest land is for roads alone. This is too expensive use of scarce forest land that too after felling more than 2000 trees, where vegetation is already sparse", he noted.

In Gujarat, FAC is considering the diversion of 51.68 ha Reserved Forest land in Rajkot for setting up 32.80 MW wind power project in favour of Wind World (India) Ltd. The other projects reviewed by the FAC recently pertain to construction of roads, irrigation projects, mining of lignite in the states of Rajasthan and Assam.

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