273 Ha Mangroves Lose 'Reserved Forest' Tag

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While the state government has recently notified 1,471 hectares of mangroves along the Thane Creek in Navi Mumbai coast as "reserved forest", environmentalists have pointed out that a large hunk of 273 hectares of mangrove cover has been mysteriously omitted as part of the reserved forest.

In 2006-07, the Konkan Divisional Commissionerate had stated in its formal report to the state government that a total forest land with mangrove cover of 1,745 hectares should be considered in the Navi Mumbai region. The current figure therefore points to a huge discrepancy while declaring the much-sought after reserved forest status to the mangrove stretch in Navi Mumbai. The reserved forest area covers mangroves of Vashi, Talvali, Sarsole, Nerul, Ghansoli, Juhu, Turbhe, Koparkhairane, Gothivli, Sonkhar, Shahbaaj, Dive, Karave and Airoli.

"The conversion of 1,471 ha area as reserved forest is done in compliance with high court judgement in October 5, 2005 and according to section 4 of Indian Forest Act 1927. I am clueless about the alleged 273 hectares which were never part of the protected forest," K P Singh, chief conservator of forest, Thane range told *TOI*.

State forest minister Sudhir Mungattiwar told *TOI* that the remaining alleged 273 hectares have been found to be "private forest land" without mangroves which cannot be converted into either protected or reserved forest status.

Environmentalists are aghast at the government's revelation at this stage.

"I have been pursuing this issue for over a decade now. According to the earlier report of Konkan divisional commissionerate, there were 1,745 hectares of mangrove land. Even the NMMC headquarters has been partially built on mangrove space. The entire mangrove stretch of sector 50 in Seawoods has been excluded in the recent notification. As many as 273 hectares of forest is yet to be notified as protected. I will fight till the goof-up is uncovered," said Sukumar Killedar, head of Save Mangrove and Navi Mumbai Existence.