

Nine Lakh Trees Gone in 5 Years

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Punjab lost almost two lakh trees every year to development works in the past five years (2011-12 to 2015-16). This was stated by the state Forest Department in an affidavit filed with the National Green Tribunal in a case against the move to axe 96,000 trees to widen the Zirakpur-Bathinda highway (National Highway 64).

A complaint was filed by Sangrur-based physician Dr Amandeep Aggarwal. The maximum of 2.4 lakh trees were felled in 2013-14. It was followed by 2.12 lakh trees in 2014-15 and 1.89 lakh in 2015-16.

The state has been divided into five forest zones — South circle, North circle, Shiwalik circle, Ferozepur circle and Bist circle. As per the affidavit, the maximum number of felling was done in South circle where 2.48 lakh trees were axed in five years. It was followed by Shiwalik (2.07 lakh), North (1.7 lakh), Ferozepur (1.59 lakh), and Bist (80,511). The varieties of these trees included shesham, neem, Arjuna, Brahma drek, melia, keekar and eucalyptus.

Dr Aggarwal said: “The government’s own record tells that what kind of development is being done in the state and at what cost. The axing of more than 9 lakh trees is a complete destruction of environment.”

In the first three months of the current financial year, around 13,000 trees were axed. The felling is still going on across the state. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Kuldeep Kumar was not available for comments as he said he was busy in a meeting.

The NGT had imposed a ban on the cutting of trees in Punjab in May, but the order was stayed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The matter is still pending.

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