

Tamilnadu State Forest Dept has 40% vacancy at various Levels

While the State Forest Department is plagued by about 40 per cent vacancy at various levels, many of the top posts in the Coimbatore, The Nilgiris and Erode forests are lying vacant for months jeopardising conservation efforts.

The posts of Field Directors (FD) in the rank of Chief Conservator of Forests of two important tiger reserves are lying vacant.

The post of FD for Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve has been lying vacant for last several months and the FD of Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR) V.T. Kandasamy retired on June 30.

Similarly, the posts of Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) for Nilgiris South, Nilgiris North and Coimbatore have been vacant for months now. The Nilgiris South DFO C. Badrasamy retired recently and he was holding additional charge of Nilgiris North as well since October 2015.

The posts lying vacant are crucial for conservation in Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve (NBR), which requires close monitoring and management, say activists. "Such a good number of vacancies and that too for crucial and field positions will have a telling effect on conservation, habitat and wildlife management and planning the much required interventions, especially when the human-animal conflict situations are on the rise," said K. Kalidasan, president of OSAI, an NGO.

While Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) has a Field Director and Deputy Director, the other vacancies in MTR are a cause for concern especially in the wake of having annexed areas from the neighbouring divisions turning the MTR into a huge geographical area.

Mudumalai alone has more than three posts of rangers, two foresters, 26 forest guards and more than 30 forest watchers posts lying vacant.

Positions of field staff remaining vacant for months together definitely calls for serious attention, says another forest official who is not willing to be quoted.

Neighbouring STR is battling vacancies of nearly four rangers, 62 watchers, 96 forest guards and close to ten foresters.

Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR) is no better. Vacancies of three rangers, more than 20 foresters, 40 plus forest guards, 42 forest watchers and more than a dozen ministerial staff have to be filled. “There are instances of one Forest Range Officer holding three responsibilities,” says a retired forest official. Similarly, posts of Project Director of Hill Area Development Project (HADP) and Managing Director of Tantea are vacant and the post of Dean Forest College in the rank of Chief Conservator of Forest is yet to be filled. Officers from neighbouring locations are handling it as additional charge.

Supply, demand gap

According to officials, the recruitment of direct rangers came to a halt in mid-1980s and only recently 72 people from Forest College were inducted into service and are on training. Their induction into field service in October may not provide any great relief because the gap between demand and supply is so huge, they say.

Admitting that some sensitive posts have fallen vacant, a senior official said the process was on and the top posts would be filled in a month.