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Settle lands in favour of forest-dwellers: Navee

BHUBANESWAR: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has asked the divisional forest officers (DFOs) to settle cases relating to ownership of forest land for forest-dwellers on a priority basis.

Addressing the DFO conference at the Secretariat here today, Naveen said that forest officials should give special attention to this matter as the State Government attaches the highest priority to it. Stating that majority of the forest-dwellers and villagers on the fringe of the forest are poor, he said that well managed forests can contribute a lot to improve their livelihood.

The State has 20 lakh hectares of degraded forests. Naveen said that the anti-poverty strategies should focus on restoration of tree cover and vegetation on these degraded forest lands. The Forest Department has drawn up a perspective plan for the next five years aiming to step up the pace of afforestation and cover 10 lakh hectares during this period, he said. Referring to the success of the joint forest management policy (JFMP) in the State, Naveen said that involvement of people in forest protection has resulted in an increase of 1,822 sq km of forest cover in Orissa.

He, however, said that people who are partners in JFMP should get benefits out of this. They should be given their due share of minor forest produce, small timber, bamboo and other forest produce, he said.

Naveen said that farm forestry and agro-forestry have huge potential for improving livelihood and income of households. He said that right mechanism should be evolved for growth of farm and agro forestry including promotion of medicinal plants and bamboo in private lands on a more significant scale.

Underscoring the need for plantation on a massive scale in urban areas, Naveen said that vacant strips by the roadsides and within institutional premises need to be brought under green cover. He urged the forest officials and people to work for making Bhubaneswar the greenest state capital in the country in the next three years.

The Chief Minister asked the officials to implement the elephant management plan with all sincerity in view of the rising man-elephant conflict.

Stating that the protection measures for Olive Ridley sea turtle with community participation should be strengthened, Naveen said that the Nandankanan Zoological Park should be elevated to one of the world class zoos with modern management.

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