

“Wildlife Protection Act – With Specific Reference to Protection of Marine Wildlife Habitat”

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ABSTRACT

The conservation of wildlife and its habitat has assumed greater importance. Wildlife habitats, which include Protected Areas and other categories of landscapes rich in wilderness, are also important life supporting systems that play a critical role in ensuring food and water security, climate change and natural hazard regulation among several other ecological systems. The categories of Protected Areas such as Conservation Reserve and Community Reserves were inserted in the Wildlife Protection Act in 2002. The Aichi Target 11 Convention on Biological Diversity indicates that by 2020 at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water and 10 percent of coastal and marine areas important for biodiversity and ecosystem services, should be conserved through Protected Areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. As per the National Biodiversity Targets under the convention, India was supposed to bring 20 per cent of the country's area, which is rich in biodiversity and ecological value, under conservation by designating them as Protected Area and undertaking other conservation measures.

KEYWORDS: Conservation of Wildlife, Ecological Systems, Biodiversity, Recommendations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over 903 Protected Areas, including 101 National Parks, 553 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 86 Conservation Reserves and 163 Community Reserves. Many of these Protected Areas are very small in size. The standard approach to wildlife conservation in India focuses on saving particular species from extinction, using Protected Areas as one of the tools. As of March 2020, India has managed to add 5 per cent of its geographical area under Protected Area, spread over 903 Protected Areas.

Protected Areas: Nearly one third of Protected Areas in India are less than 10 sq km. Most Protected Areas, in reality are administrative boundaries created out of convenience, and therefore cannot be treated as inclusive of all wildlife habitats in the country. In fact, declaration of any Protected Area and its buffer zone (such as Ecosensitive Zones) is a political process, and the declared boundaries do not necessarily overlap with actual ecological needs. Furthermore, strong protection within Protected Areas has meant that they have exceeded their carrying capacity, forcing wildlife to move outside their administrative boundaries. This makes the protection of habitats outside Protected Areas even more important.

Geographical Area: Almost 20 per cent of India's geographical area is under some kind of conservation planning and is managed for biodiversity conservation, which includes a large tract of lands managed by State Forest Divisions and private owners apart from the Protected Areas. These forests referred to as Reserve Forest (RF), State Forest (SF), Protected Forest (PF) etc, are regulated under Indian Forest Act, 1927 and various other State Legislations.

Territorial Forests (TF) : The forests owned by the State are often referred to as Territorial Forests (TF). They harbour nearly all of India's 36 endemic mammals and act as important connectors with the more strongly guarded, but scattered, network of Protected Areas across the country. At the same time, some TFs are also one of the most human dominated wildlife areas, prone to heightened human wildlife conflict and poaching. Despite their valuable ecological importance, TFs remain neglected under India's patchwork of laws.

Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972 : India's Protected Areas, which are designated under the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972 have received increased protection, better resources and the benefit of specialized scientific training of wildlife. On the other hand, TFs, which include reserve Forests are governed by State Forest Departments using the vehicle of the Indian Forest Act, 1927. The departments have historically been more concerned with the extraction of commercially valuable forest produce with little concern for wildlife protection. Except for cases of poaching, the Wildlife Protection Act provides very limited protection to wildlife habitats inside TFs. For instance, any activity involving the use of Protected Areas requires the prior recommendation of the National and State Boards of Wildlife (NBWL/SBWL). However, no such recommendation is required for wildlife habitats outside Protected Areas, although they may be just as rich in wildlife or important wildlife corridors.

II. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The future of wildlife conservation in India depends on how well governments are able to manage TFs. This requires a systematic and scientific approach and sufficient resources. The working plans of all TF divisions in India should compulsorily include wildlife conservation plans, efficient monitoring mechanisms and measures for mitigating human wildlife conflicts. It must ensure the compatibility with regional wildlife requirements, to prevent ecologically unsustainable land use, facilitate framing of guidelines, encourage research, organize training of frontline staff in the management of human-wildlife interactions and most importantly facilitate community-driven conservation efforts.

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