

National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016)

PREAMBLE

Background

The first National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) was adopted in 1983, based upon the decision taken in the XV meeting of the Indian Board for Wildlife held in 1982. The plan had outlined the strategies and action points for wildlife conservation which are still relevant. In the meanwhile, however, some problems have become more acute and new concerns have become apparent, requiring a change in priorities. Increased commercial use of natural resources, continued growth of human and livestock populations and changes in consumption patterns are causing greater demographic impacts. Biodiversity conservation has thus become a focus of interest. The National Forest Policy was also formulated in 1988, giving primacy to conservation. Hence this new National Wildlife Action Plan.

Overview

1. The term Wildlife encompasses all uncultivated flora and undomesticated fauna. Every species has the right to live and every threatened species must be protected to prevent its extinction.
2. Water, wilderness and wildlife are irrevocably interlinked. With mounting agricultural, industrial and demographic pressures, wilderness areas, which are the richest repositories of wildlife and biodiversity have either shrunk or disappeared. Their continued existence is crucial for the long-term survival of the biodiversity and the ecosystems supporting them.
3. Effective ecosystem conservation is the foundation of long-term ecological and economic stability. Natural processes, forests and other wild habitats recharge aquifers, maintain water regimes and moderate the impact of floods, droughts and cyclones. Thereby they ensure food security and regulate climate change. They are also a source of food, fodder, fuel and other products supplementing the sustenance of local communities.
4. India ranks sixth among the 12 mega biodiversity countries of the world. Conservation of biodiversity is directly linked with conservation of ecosystems and thus with water and food security. These together

constitute a major plank of Indian economy.

5. National planning has not taken into account the adverse ecological consequences of shrinkage and degradation of wilderness from the pressures of population and commercialisation. As a result, we have witnessed the alarming erosion of our natural heritage which comprises rivers, aquifers, forests, grasslands, mountains, wetlands, coastal and marine habitats, arid lands and deserts. This has also affected natural phenomena such as breeding, ranging and migration of wildlife and geomorphological features.
6. The increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, the plummeting fertility of our soils and the accelerated degradation of our fresh water resources have imposed a crippling financial burden on the nation. This underscores the need to realign development priorities to take into account ecological imperatives including the protection of wild species, which sustain and enhance natural habitats, even as they depend on such areas for their survival.
7. Rural development for communities inhabiting forest lands and other wilderness regions suffers both from inadequate resources and inappropriate measures. It has failed to address their strong dependence upon natural biomass resources vis-à-vis the shrinking and degrading resource base. Farm productivity has also declined due to lack of proper support, causing impoverishment and enhanced pressures upon natural areas. Resource impoverished communities have therefore begun to place even greater pressure on the biomass of our forests and has led to widespread alienation of people from the goals of nature conservation efforts.
8. Habitat loss caused by developmental projects such as dams, mines etc. compound the problems of wildlife conservation
9. The constraining impact of habitat loss has been compounded by illegal trade fuelled by a rising demand of wildlife products and their lucrative prices in the international market.

POLICY IMPERATIVES

Ecological Security

To protect the long-term ecological security of India, the national development agenda must recognise the imperative of identifying and protecting natural ecosystems from over-exploitation, contamination and degradation. Short

term economic gains must not be permitted to undermine ecological security.

Priority to Conservation

Assigning conservation a high priority both at the level of central and state governments is an imperative. Its integration in all development programmes, evolving appropriate funding mechanism, enhancement of financial allocations and provision of adequate personnel with requisite expertise has to be ensured, to arrest the ongoing trend of degradation and to restore wildlife and its habitat.

National Land Use Policy:

The NWAP cannot be executed in isolation. Wildlife conservation cannot be restricted to national parks and sanctuaries. Areas outside the protected area network are often vital ecological corridor links and must be protected to prevent isolation of fragments of biodiversity, which will not survive in the long run. Land and water use policies will need to accept the imperative of strictly protecting ecologically fragile habitats and regulating use elsewhere.

Primacy for Water and Sustenance:

Water must be recognised as a prime produce of natural forests. Forests must be managed to optimise and protect hydrological systems. The National Forest Policy of 1988 which emphasises conserving our natural heritage in the form of natural forests, flora and fauna, is in consonance with this imperative. A critical imperative is also to recognise forest, wetlands and other natural habitats as a source of survival for millions of people, in particular as a source of NTFP and aquatic resources.

***In situ* Conservation**

Primacy must be accorded to *in situ* conservation, the sheet anchor of wildlife conservation. *Ex situ* measures in zoological parks and gene banks may supplement this objective, without depleting scarce wild resources.

Peoples' Support for Wildlife

Local communities traditionally depend on natural biomass and they must, therefore, have the first lien on such resources. Such benefits must be subject to assumption of a basic responsibility to protect and conserve these resources by suitably modifying unsustainable activities. Conservation programmes must attempt to reconcile livelihood security with wildlife

protection through creative zonation and by adding new Protected Area (PA) categories in consultation with local communities, such as an inviolate core, conservation buffer, community buffer and multiple use areas.

Man-Animal Conflict

While increasing man-animal conflict is an outcome of shrinkage, fragmentation and deterioration of habitats, it has caused destruction of wildlife and generated animosity against wild animals and protected areas. This is a crucial management issue, which needs to be addressed through innovative approaches.

STRATEGY FOR ACTION

Adopting and implementing strategies and needs outlined above will call for action covering the following parameters:

III Conservation of Wild and Endangered Species and their Habitats.

IX Conservation Awareness and Education

III Conservation of Wild and Endangered Species and their habitats:

Overview and Objectives

The aim of the NWP is to conserve *in situ* all taxa of flora and fauna along with the full range of ecosystems they inhabit. The ecological requirements for the survival of threatened, rare and endangered species, together with their community associations of flora and fauna, must be ensured.

The isolation of animal species due to fragmentation of habitats reduces relict populations to unviable levels, leading to local extinction. For highly endangered species like the Great Indian Bustard, Bengal Florican, Asiatic Lion, Wild Buffalo, Dugong, the Manipur Brow Antlered Deer and the like, alternative homes are imperative. Where *in situ* conservation efforts are unlikely to succeed, *ex situ* captive breeding and rehabilitation measures may be necessary, in tandem with the preparation of their wild habitats to receive back captive populations, specially in respect of lesser-known species where status and distribution of wild animals are not fully known

Alteration of genetic purity of certain wild species through inbreeding with domesticated, feral counterparts is yet another grave impending threat, seriously jeopardising genetic purity of species like the Wild Buffalo, Wild

Pig and Jungle Fowl. It must be ensured that natural phenomena involving *inter alia* pollination, breeding, feeding, movements and migrations are not hampered but assisted.

Action required

1. To undertake a programme of *ex situ* captive breeding and rehabilitation in the wild for critically endangered species in accordance with IUCN guidelines, after developing requisite techniques and capabilities in this regard.

Priority Projects

Develop capabilities for planned breeding and reintroduction of captive bred populations of identified endangered species in accordance with IUCN guidelines.

Timing : To start in 2003 and ongoing

Responsibility : CZA, State Governments, and Scientific Institutions.

IX. CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND PROTECTED AREA INTERPRETATION

Overview and Objectives

To win support for wildlife conservation by explaining the rationale behind the protection of natural ecosystems to politicians, legislators, judges, planners, technocrats and bureaucrats who manage the nation. To elicit broad-based public support from different sections of society, particularly communities neighbouring PAs and forests. To convey a sense of urgency to young people and win their support for the protection of India's natural heritage. To inform and involve the media on issues surrounding wildlife conservation and to highlight the connections between destabilised ecosystems and the falling quality of human life. To explain the connection between healthy ecosystems and India's water and food security.

Action required

1. Training personnel, especially from local communities, for wildlife education so that they can be employed as interpreters/guides at PAs, Zoological Gardens, Natural History Museums, etc.
2. Enhance the role of zoos as centres of conservation awareness.

Priority projects:

1. Encourage creation of nature immersing enclosures for display of wild animals in zoos and explain ecological linkages of species displayed through appropriate signage.

Timing: To start in 2003 and ongoing.

Responsibility: CZA, State/UT Governments and NGOs.

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