

GUIDELINES FOR DECLARATION OF ECO-SENSITIVE ZONES AROUND NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES

1. Background:

1.1. IBWL Decision:

1.1.1 During the XXI meeting of the Indian Board for Wildlife held on 21st January 2002, a 'Wildlife Conservation Strategy-2002' was adopted wherein point no.9 envisaged that "lands falling within 10 Kms of the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries should be notified as eco-fragile zones under section 3 (v) of the Environment (Protection) Act and Rule 5 Sub rule (viii) & (x) of the Environment (Protection) Rules."

1.1.2 The Additional Director General of Forests (WL), vide letter dated 6th February 2002, had requested all the Chief Wildlife Wardens for listing out such areas within 10 Kms of the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries and furnish detailed proposals for their notification as eco-sensitive areas under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

1.1.3 In response, some of the State Governments had raised concern over applicability of the 10 Kms range from the Protected Area boundary and informed that most of the human habitation and other areas including important cities in these States would come under the purview of eco-sensitive zone and will adversely affect the development.

1.2. National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016)

1.2.1 The National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) 2002-2016 indicates that *"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."*

1.2.2 The Action Plan also indicates that *"All identified areas around Protected Areas and wildlife corridors to be declared as ecologically fragile under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986."*

1.3. Decision of National Board for Wildlife:

1.3.1 Considering the constraints communicated by the states, the proposal was re-examined by the National Board for Wildlife in its 2nd meeting held on 17th March 2005 and it was decided that the '**delineation of eco-sensitive**

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zones would have to be site specific and relate to regulation, rather than prohibition, of specific activities'. The decision was communicated to all the State Governments for compliance vide letter dated 27th May 2005. Thereafter, it was further communicated with subsequent reminders.

1.4. Hon'ble Supreme Court's decision:

1.4.1 A Public Interest Litigation was also filed by the Goa Foundation vide their Writ Petition No. 460/2004 before the Hon'ble Supreme Court regarding the issue of declaration of eco-sensitive zones.

1.4.2 Vide their order dated 4th December 2006, Hon'ble Supreme Court had directed the Ministry of Environment & Forests to give a final opportunity to all States/Union territories to respond to the letter dated 27.5.2005 and that the State Governments send their proposals within four weeks, to the Ministry. It was also directed that all cases where environmental clearances were granted where activities are within 10 Kms zone, be referred to Standing Committee of NBWL.

2. Statutory Provisions

2.1 *Section 5 C(1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 states that it shall be the duty of the National Board for Wildlife to promote the conservation and development of Wildlife and forests by such measures as it thinks fit.*

2.2 *Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (EPA) gives power to the Central Government i.e. the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to take all measures that it feels are necessary for protecting and improving the quality of the environment and to prevent and control environmental pollution. To meet this objective, the Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards [Section 3(2)(v)]*

2.3 *Section 5(1) of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 (EPR), states that the central government can prohibit or restrict the location of industries and carrying on certain operations or processes on the basis of considerations like the biological diversity of an area (clause v) maximum allowable limits of concentration of pollutants for an area (clause ii) environmentally compatible land use (clause vi) proximity to protected areas (clause viii).*

3. Purpose for declaring Eco-Sensitive Zones:

The purpose of declaring Eco-sensitive Zones around National Parks and Sanctuaries is to create some kind of "Shock Absorber" for the Protected Areas. They would also act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection. As has been decided by the National Board for Wildlife, the activities in the Eco-sensitive zones would be of a regulatory nature rather than prohibitive nature, unless and otherwise so required.

4. Extent of Eco-Sensitive Zones:

4.1 Many of the existing Protected Areas have already undergone tremendous development in close vicinity to their boundaries. Some of the Protected Areas actually lying in the urban setup (Eg. Guindy National Park, Tamil Nadu, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Maharashtra, etc). Therefore, defining the extent of eco-sensitive zones around Protected Areas will have to be kept flexible and Protected Area specific. The width of the Eco-sensitive Zone and type of regulations will differ from Protected Area to Protected Area. However, as a general principle the width of the Eco-sensitive Zone could go upto 10 Kms around a Protected Area as provided in the Wildlife Conservation Strategy-2002.

4.2 In case where sensitive corridors, connectivity and ecologically important patches, crucial for landscape linkage, are even beyond 10 kms width, these should be included in the Eco-sensitive Zone.

4.3 Further, even in context of a particular Protected Area, the distribution of an area of Eco-sensitive Zone and the extent of regulation may not be uniform all around and it could be of variable width and extent.

5. Need for guidelines:

5.1 As has been indicated vide para 1.4 above, Hon'ble Supreme Court has vide their order dated 4th December 2006 directed all the State/Union Territory Governments to forward proposals for declaration of eco-sensitive zones around its Protected Areas. However, only States like Haryana, Gujarat, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Assam, Goa have forwarded proposals. However, several other States/Union Territories have not come forward, perhaps for want of guidelines in this regard.

5.2 In this context, it is pertinent to note here that Hon'ble Supreme Court vide their judgment dated 3rd December 2010 in the case relating to the construction of park at NOIDA near Okhla Bird Sanctuary filed by Shri Anand Arya & Anr vs. Union of India (I.A. Nos 2609-2610 of 2009) in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 202/1995, had noted that the State Government of Uttar Pradesh had not

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declared Eco-sensitive zones around its Protected Areas as the Government of India had not issued any guidelines in this regard.

5.3 The Ministry of Environment & Forests had set up a committee under the Chairmanship of Shri Pronab Sen for identifying parameters for designating Ecologically Sensitive Areas in India. The said Committee had identified parameters for declaration of specific units of land/water etc as Ecologically Sensitive Zones based on parameters like richness of flora& fauna; slope; rarity & endemism of species in the area; origins of rivers etc. However, these parameters do not basically apply to the Eco-sensitive zones in the instant context, i.e around Protected Areas. In the instant case, the Eco-sensitive zones are meant to act as a "Shock absorbers"/ "transition zone" to the Protected Areas by regulating and managing the activities around such Protected Areas.

6. The procedure to be adopted :

6.1 As has been indicated in the forgoing paras, the basic aim is to regulate certain activities around National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary so as to minimize the negative impacts of such activities on the fragile ecosystem encompassing the Protected Area. As a first step towards achieving this goal, it is a pre-requisite that an inventory of the different land use patterns and the different types of activities, types and number of industries operating around each of the Protected Area (National Parks, Sanctuaries) as well as important Corridors be made. The inventory could be done by the concerned Range Officers, who can take a stock of activities within 10 km of his range.

6.2 For the above purpose, a small committee comprising the concerned Wildlife Warden, an Ecologist, an official from the Local Self Government and an official of the Revenue Department of the concerned area, could be formed. The said committee could suggest the:

- (i) *Extent of eco-sensitive zones for the Protected Area being considered.*
- (ii) *The requirement of such a zone to act as a shock absorber*
- (iii) *To suggest the best methods for management of the eco-sensitive zones, so suggested.*
- (iv) *To suggest broad based thematic activities to be included in the Master Plan for the region.*

6.3 Based on the above, the Chief Wildlife Warden could group the activities under the following categories (an indicative list of such activities is attached as ANNEXURE-1):-

- (i) *Prohibited*
- (ii) *Restricted with safeguards.*
- (iii) *Permissible*

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6.4 Once the proposal for Eco-sensitive zones has been finalized, the same may be forwarded to the Ministry of Environment and Forests for further processing and notification. Here, it may be noted that, the State/Union Territory Forest Department could forward the proposals to the respective authority in the State Government with copy to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, as and when the proposals (even if it is for single Protected Area) are complete. An indicative list of details that need to be submitted along with the proposals is at **ANNEXURE-2**.

6.5 It is to mention here that in cases where the boundary of a Protected Area abuts the boundary of another State/Union Territory where it does not form part of any Protected Area, it shall be the endeavour of both the State/Union Territory Governments to have a mutual consultation and decide upon the width of the eco-sensitive zone around the Protected Area in question.

6.6 The State Government should endeavour to convey a very strong message to the public that ESZ are not meant to hamper their day to day activities, but instead, is meant to protect the precious forests/Protected Areas in their locality from any negative impact, and also to refine the environment around the Protected Areas. A copy of the notification of the Sultanpur Eco-sensitive Zone issued by the Ministry is attached herewith at **ANNEXURE-3** for reference and guidance.

7. These guidelines are indicative in nature and the State / Union Territory Governments may use these as basic framework to develop specific guidelines applicable in the context of their National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, important corridors, etc. with a view to minimizing and preferably eliminating any negative impact on protected areas.

ANNEXURE-1

Identification of Activities

While some of the activities could be allowed in all the eco-sensitive areas, others will need to be regulated / prohibited. However, which activity can be regulated or prohibited and to what extent, would have to be PA specific. A broad list of activities (this may need supplementation) which could be allowed, promoted, regulated or prohibited is given in the table below:

Sl. No.	Activity	Prohibited	Regulated	Permitted	Remarks
1.	Commercial Mining	Y			Regulation will not prohibit the digging of earth for construction or repair of houses and for manufacture of country tiles or bricks for housing for personal consumption
2.	Felling of trees		Y		With permission from appropriate authority
3.	Setting of saw mills	Y			
4.	Setting of industries causing pollution (Water, Air, Soil, Noise, etc.)	Y			
5.	Establishment of hotels and resorts		Y		As per approved master plan, which takes care of habitats allowing no restriction on movement of wild animals
6.	Commercial use of firewood	Y			For hotels and other business related establishment

7.	Drastic change of agriculture systems		Y		
8.	Commercial use of natural water resources including ground water harvesting		Y		As per approved master plan, which takes care of habitats allowing no restriction on movement of wild animals.
9.	Establishment of major hydroelectric projects	Y			
10.	Erection of electrical cables		Y		Promote underground cabling
11.	Ongoing agriculture and horticulture practices by local communities			Y	However, excessive expansion of some of these activities should be regulated as per the master plan
12.	Rain Water harvesting			Y	Should be actively promoted
13.	Fencing of premises of hotels and lodges		Y		
14.	Organic farming			Y	Should be actively promoted
15.	Use of polythene bags by shopkeepers		Y		
16.	Use of renewable energy sources			Y	Should be actively promoted
17.	Widening of roads		Y		This should be done with proper EIA

					and mitigation measures
18.	Movement of vehicular traffic at night		Y		For commercial purpose
19.	Introduction of exotic species		Y		
20.	Use or production of any hazardous substances	Y			
21.	Undertaking activities related to tourism like over-flying the National Park area by any aircraft, hot-air balloons	Y			
22.	Protection of hill slopes and river banks		Y		As per the master plan
23.	Discharge of effluents and solid waste in natural water bodies or terrestrial area	Y			
24.	Air and vehicular pollution		Y		
25.	Sign boards & hoardings		Y		As per the master plan
26.	Adoption of green technology for all activities			Y	Should be actively promoted.

ANNEXURE-2

**GENERIC INFORMATIONS TO BE INCORPORATED IN THE
PROPOSALS FOR DECLARATION OF ECO-SENSITIVE ZONE
AROUND PROTECTED AREAS**

- (i) Delineation of the physical boundaries on a topo-sheet with precise description in geographic terms together with a description of the significant features/attributes that would potentially qualify the area as eco-sensitive zone. A description of the boundaries alongwith the list of villages with exception and exemption in the delineated buffer zone area.
- (ii) An inventory of the existing legal status of rights, entitlements, privileges and obligations of the local communities.
- (iii) A description of bio-diversity values including bio-geographical representatives, endemism, species richness, \ geo-morphological characteristics, and unique land use practices including aesthetic and cultural values.
- (iv) A description of the resource base indicating the economic potential and livelihood implication for the people residing in and around the proposed eco-sensitive area.
- (v) An inventory of activities to be regulated and/ or prohibited in the proposed eco-sensitive zone.
- (vi) List of the protected areas for declaring eco-sensitive zone.
