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MINUTES OF THE 11TH STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF PROJECT ELEPHANT

The 11th meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant was held on 24th December 2007 in Paryavaran Bhawan, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment and Forests.

List of participants is annexed.

Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment and Forests welcomed all the participants in the meeting and briefly highlighted the progress and major activities made under the project since the last meeting. He cautioned that though the population of elephants is on the rise, the shrinkage of their habitats and discontinuity between vital corridors is a matter of great concern for all of us. If not addressed properly, it can have serious repercussions on the long-term conservation of wild elephants. It was also stressed upon by him that human-elephant conflict is on the rise at many places creating hardships to fringe area communities. We need to develop appropriate strategies for addressing this as well. These two issues require our immediate attention and prioritized action.

Before taking up the discussion of Agenda Items, Director (PE) informed that in the 10th Plan Ministry had sponsored three research projects, out of which two have been completed and requested the permission of the Chair to allow two small presentations by the Principal Investigators of the two completed Research Projects. The permission was given by the Chair and the two PIs namely – Dr K K Sharma from AAU, Gauhati and Dr B C Patra from CRRRI, Cuttack were introduced.

Agenda Item No. 1

Confirmation of the minutes of the 10th meeting of the Steering Committee.

The minutes of the 10th meeting of the Steering Committee were confirmed.

Agenda Item No. 2

Action taken on the recommendations made in the 10th meeting.

- (i) Insurance for crop damages

The Hon'ble Minister informed that Ministry of Agriculture has communicated their inability to include the crop damage under the Agriculture Insurance Scheme but he will take up the matter with Ministry of Finance as the insurance companies are controlled by them. Some of the CWLWs also expressed that they had taken up the matter at state level also but the Companies are not willing. CWLW, Uttarakhand said that one of the private Company is willing but the premium demand is very high and requested Ministry's support for the same. It was decided that other states should also explore this and subject to fund availability, Ministry would consider the request.

(ii) Declaration of elephant reserves

As far as declaration of two ERs in Orissa is concerned , Director (PE) informed that Secretary (E & F) through DO has requested Chief Secretary , Orissa to reconsider the decision. CWLW , Orissa expressed some reservation on the extent of Reserve . It was clarified that Secretary has clearly written that in case state wants to rationalize the boundary , Ministry is willing to consider . It was decided to pursue the matter with the state.

Agenda Item No. 3

ALL INDIA ESTIMATION OF ELEPHANTS (2007)

Hon'ble Minister expressed that though estimation for the current year will take place in NE States in Feb 2008 , the trends for the last three censuses are showing a decline in population and thus needs attention of the states. Director (PE) explained the current population trends received from the respective states and said though the Region wise population is showing stable trend , States showing sharp decline in population like Karnataka and Uttarakhand must examine and find reasons why the migratory population are staying back in adjoining states . Mr Subimal Roy , Member suggested that rather than numbers , states should give range along with other details like sex ratio , tuskers populations etc. It was explained by Director (PE) that in respect of most of the states such details are available. The Committee accepted the population estimates reported by the states.

Agenda item No. 4

Agenda items suggested by members of the Steering Committee.

Shri B N Talukdar

Since shri Talukdar was not present , the agenda was not deliberated in detail. CWLW , Assam , however , raised the issue that decision to allow sale and purchase of captive elephants was taken long time back in the steering committee and there is need to allow the same . He also wanted one time relaxation for

those who could not declare their elephants in 2003 to declare the same. It was explained by Director (PE) that the matter is under consideration of the Ministry, however Ministry is receiving representation also from various sources on the likely abuse once sale – purchase is reopened and therefore members can suggest safeguards . It was suggested by Director (PE) that till it is allowed , CWLWs can consider providing gainful employment to owners of captive elephants in eco tourism as initiated by CWLW , Assam.

Shri P K Ghosh

Since Shri Ghosh was not present , it was decided to send him the comments received from CWLW , Uttarakhand for his perusal.

Shri K C Panicker

The need for training to mahouts and vets was well appreciated , however Director (PE) informed that Vets training is being conducted every year in Assam and Kerala . As far as mahouts training is concerned , CWLWs of these two states would be requested to arrange the same for which facility is available in the states. Director (PE) also informed that for specialized treatment of elephants , ministry is pursuing the matter with two vets colleges – one each in Kerala and Assam to declare them as centre of excellence so that adequate infrastructure and capacity is built in these Centres.

Shri M K Appayya

The proposal of Mr Appayya to involve non – officials members more effectively in the implementation of the scheme was reiterated by Dr Panicker in the meeting. It was explained by Director (PE) that till now their services was being taken on need based approach , however Ministry has received guidelines from Planning Commission to involve experts , non – officials in the Planning and monitoring of the schemes . It was agreed to involve them in the process.

Dr K K Sharma from , AAU gave a presentation on main findings of the study done on health care and management protocol for captive elephants and submitted the Report to the Hon'ble Minister. The report was appreciated by all present and it was decided to get the Report widely circulated for implementation.

Dr B C Patra from CRRRI , Cuttack also gave a presentation on the main findings of the research project given to them for development of long awned rice varieties and paddy storage structure. It was decided to carry out extension services under eco-development activities and also to approach Ministry of Agriculture for extension services.

The meeting ended with Vote of thanks from the chair.