

Proceedings of the 13th Meeting of the Steering Committee of
Project Elephant, held at Parliament House, New Delhi on 17th December, 2014 at
Parliament House, New Delhi

The 13th Meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant was held at 4:00 Pm on 17th December, 2014 at Parliament House, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Shri Prakash Javadekar, Hon'ble Union Minister, Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

List of participants is annexed.

The Hon'ble Minister welcomed all the participants to the meeting and directed the Member Secretary of the Steering Committee to take up the agenda items of the meeting for deliberations by the members of the Committee.

Agenda Item No. 1: Confirmation of the minutes of the 12th meeting of the Steering Committee:

The minutes of the 12th meeting of the Steering Committee held on 4th February, 2010 were confirmed.

Agenda Item No. 2: Follow up Action on Decisions Taken in the 12th Meeting of the Steering Committee.

2.1: Review of Methodology of Elephant Census used in India:

The Committee was informed that in both (i) Direct Method (Counting of elephants at water holes) and (ii) Indirect (Dung Decay) Method are used for population estimation. It was decided to review the methods of elephant census/ population estimation to develop more reliable methods.

2.2: Declaration of Elephant Reserves:

The Chief Wildlife Warden Odisha Shri S. S. Srivastava informed the Committee that the State Government has decided to withdraw their proposals for notification of South Odisha and Baitarani Elephant Reserves. Shri Y. S. Shullai, Chief Wildlife Warden, Meghalaya informed that the State Government will shortly issue final notification for declaration of Khasi Elephant Reserve.

2.3: Declaration of Elephant Reserves of Karnataka:

This agenda item was discussed under Agenda Item No. 3.

2.4: Initiatives to Prevent Death of Elephants due to Train Hits:

The Steering Committee was informed that Shri Shakti Prasad Nayak has filed a Writ Petition WP(C) No. 107 of 2013 in Hon'ble Supreme Court of India to issue directions to the Government to prevent death of elephants due to train accidents. Project Elephant is working along with Ministry of Railways and State Governments to devise strategies to minimize death of elephants due to train accidents. Final judgment in the case is awaited.

2.5: Constitution of Task Force for Project Elephant:

The Steering Committee was informed that a Task Force on Project Elephant was constituted by the Ministry on 15th February, 2010 to look into the entire issue of elephant conservation in the Country comprehensively and suggest suitable steps to strengthen Project Elephant. The Task Force submitted a report titled 'Gajah' on 31.08.2010. The report has given detailed recommendations on all aspects of elephant conservation in the Country. Some decisions have been taken on selected recommendations of the report. However, many important recommendations are yet to be considered.

Dr. R. Sukumar, DGF&SS and many other members of the Committee suggested Project Elephant needs to be strengthened financially, administratively and technically for effective conservation and management of elephants in India. It was also decided to reconstitute two committees of experts for (i) Strengthening of Elephant Corridors and (ii) Implementation of Elephant Task Force. These suggestions were accepted.

Agenda Item No. 3: Declaration of Elephant Reserves of Karnataka:

As per directions of DGF & SS, this subject was taken as a separate agenda item. Shri Ajay Mishra, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), informed the Committee that State Government of Karnataka has submitted complete information for inclusion of Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent forest areas under Mysore Elephant Reserve for effective conservation of elephants, as sought by the Ministry. Steering Committee accepted the proposal of Government of Karnataka.

Shri Mishra further requested the Steering Committee to expedite another proposal of Government of Karnataka for inclusion of Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary under Nilgiri Elephant Reserve. It was informed that the proposal has been referred to elephant expert for his opinion and further action will be taken after receipt of his comments.

20.9.2019

Agenda Item No. 4.1: Elephant herds moving into non-traditional areas and Other Instances of Man Elephant Conflict:

The Hon'ble Minister and Chairman of the Steering Committee observed that Human elephant conflict is a very serious problem, which has resulted in considerable loss of property and loss of life of people and consequent retaliation by local people leading to injury and death of many elephants. He invited suggestions from the members of the Steering Committee to counter the problem.

- Dr. S. K. Patnaik opined that a strategy has to be developed to handle the situation as some of the existing elephant corridors have become redundant and many elephants are using new areas for migration. Hence there is a need to relook into the present network of elephant corridors
- Dr. M. Madhusudan suggested review of population estimation methods and preparation of maps of elephant population distribution in India.
- Dr. Sukumar advised to set up small groups of experts to understand the pattern of dispersal/migration of elephants and find measures to handle the situations. This may also help to mitigate situations of human elephant conflicts.
- Mr. Vivek Menon proposed use of bee hives and chilly as bio fences to deter elephants from raiding crops. These techniques are also being used in many countries in Africa.
- Dr. Sukumar also proposed the framework in terms of zonation of areas as Elephant Conservation Zone or Elephant Co-existence zone for the more intact areas and the other areas as Elephant Removal Zone.
- Shri B. S. Bonal, Member Secretary, CZA quoted example of Majuli island in Assam, where generation of elephants, born in non-traditional areas, are difficult to tackle, as they are not familiar with traditional elephant habitats.

The Hon'ble Minister suggested that expert committees may be constituted at national as well as regional levels to study such issues and suggest viable and practical ways to deal with above issues. He further suggested that the expert committees may devise site specific solutions for human-elephant conflicts, which is increasing across the Country.

The Hon'ble Minister also desired to know as to how other countries are dealing with human elephant conflict. The Committee was shown visual depiction of modern techniques being used in other countries and also some which are still in development stages such as bee fences, chilly fences, SMS based warning systems/lights, use of wireless networks and infra-sonic system for detection/ deterrence of human elephant encounters. Hon'ble Minister supported use of modern technology for dealing with human elephant conflicts.

The Hon'ble Minister also invited the Committee members to attend the first meeting of the Consultative Committee of Members of the Parliament attached to the Ministry to be held at Bandipur, Karnataka on 5th January, 2015.

Agenda Item No. 4.2: Dalma Elephant Herds Causing Damage to Crops, Houses & Death/ Injury to People and Consequent Retaliatory Killing of Elephants:

CCF (Wildlife), Jharkhand informed the Committee that Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary in Jharkhand, covering 192 sq km area, supports a population of about 200 wild elephants. However, elephant habitat within sanctuary is highly degraded, hence roughly 50% wild elephants from the sanctuary migrate to Odisha and West Bengal.

Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha and Chief Conservator of Forests, Jharkhand briefed the Committee on the damage caused by wild elephants in their states, during their migration across inter-state borders in Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha borders. Additional Director General (Wildlife) informed the Committee that Project Elephant division has already initiated the process of constituting inter-state committees, at State level (comprising of CWLWs, elephant experts and NGOs) and Division level (comprising of DFO/ PA Director, elephant experts and local representatives), to avoid such situations and for greater cooperation and sharing of information on elephant movement among the neighboring States. The Committee appreciated creation of trans-boundary institutions on borders of States and also agreed to form similar institutions along international boundaries.

Dr. Sukumar informed that Government of Odisha has entered into a MoU with IISc to study the migration pattern of elephants within Odisha. This would help in deciding the long term future of elephants in a larger landscape. There is a need to be pragmatic and identify chunks of forests where conservation efforts can be taken in the "Elephant Conservation Zone". In Odisha, three such areas have been identified namely Simlipal, Sambalpur and Mahanadi. Such efforts can also be taken up in Jharkhand. Additional PCCF (Wildlife), Karnataka suggested that area/location specific solutions should be considered to address the problems relating to human-elephant conflict.

The Hon'ble Minister sought views of the Committee on trans-location of elephants from conflict zones to suitable elephant reserves. He advised that a balance needs to be reached to protect interests of elephants and elephants both.

APCCF (Wildlife), Tamilnadu pointed out that translocation of wild elephants is possible, but is a difficult and risky task. There is possibility of injury and even death of elephants and sometimes animals may return to original area. Dr. Sukumar briefed that selective capture of wild elephants should be done for relocation to other areas. Instead of adult males, young males should be translocated as they settle down in new areas. There have hardly been any cases of translocation of female elephants. In many instances of translocation of elephants

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In a new area, people of the area have apprehension about the exercise. Hon'ble Minister concluded that site specific solutions should be identified and publicized through awareness drive in conflict areas.

Agenda Item No. 4.3: Miscellaneous Agenda Items

4.3.1: Elephant Rescue/ Rehabilitation Centers:

Addl. PCCF (Wildlife), Karnataka sought approval of the Committee on the establishment of rescue centre at Karnataka near Human elephant conflicts. He informed that the process of obtaining permission from Central Zoo Authority (CZA) and Supreme Court for the setting up of elephant rescue/ rehabilitation centers is a tedious and long process. IG (WL) was of the opinion that State Governments should take proactive steps for establishment of elephant rescue/ rehabilitation centers, the Ministry and CZA will render all possible assistance in this process. The Member Secretary, CZA informed that in case of elephant rescue centers, which are transit facilities only, permission from CZA and Supreme Court are not necessary. CZA shall also give technical support in designing the rescue centers.

4.3.2: Cooperation with Wildlife Institute of India (WII):

Director, WII, was of the opinion that piecemeal approach towards training of Park Managers of Elephant Reserves at WII is not a solution in the long run. He suggested that a mechanism, in the form of 'Elephant Cell' should be created within WII to deal with matters relating to Project Elephant Division. A similar arrangement already exists for tigers between WII and NTCA. A separate budget for 'Elephant Cell' should be earmarked. The proposal of Director, WII was accepted by the Steering Committee.

4.3.3: Mobile Veterinary Diagnostic Unit:

The Commissioner, Animal Husbandry, DAHDF, Ministry of Agriculture, informed that at present no mobile veterinary diagnostic unit exists till date for wild and captive elephants in the country. This needs urgent attention. Similarly the guidelines for post mortem of elephants should also be circulated. These suggestions were accepted.

4.3.4: Ex-gratia Compensation to public:

As recommended by the Elephant Task Force, the ex-gratia payment for death of persons caused by elephants has been increased from Rs. 1.00 lakh to Rs.

2.00 lakh. It was suggested that ex-gratia amount may be further enhanced to Rs 3.00 lakh.

4.3.5: Procurement of Drugs for Tranquilization of Elephants:

APCCF (Wildlife) Karnataka pointed out that States are facing difficulty in procurement of the drug "Immobilon", as only CZA is authorized to import the drug. Member Secretary, CZA, informed that authorized agencies for import tranquilization are Nandankanan Zoo, Bhubneshwar and Assam State Zoo, Guwahati. It was decided that authorization for import of tranquilization drugs may be given to the State Governments. If required, the Ministry shall take up the matter with DGFT.

The meeting ended with thanks to the Chair.