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Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
Project Elephant Division

Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,
Jor Bagh Road,
New Delhi-110003
Dated 30th October, 2017
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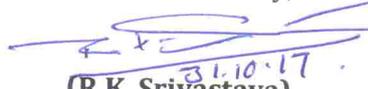
OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Sub: Proceedings of the 14th Meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant held on 9.10.2017 at 12.00 Noon at Teesta Conference Hall, New Delhi -reg.

The undersigned is enclosing herewith the proceedings of the meeting cited in the subject above. This issues with the approval of the Hon'ble Minister of State, Environment, Forests & Climate Change. Kindly send your comments within one week positively.

Encls: As above

Yours faithfully,


(R.K. Srivastava)

Inspector General of Forests
(Project Elephant)
Phone No: 24695292

Distribution:

1. All Members of Steering Committee of Project Elephant.
2. All Chief Wildlife Warden, PE States.
3. Director, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.
4. IGF (WL), MoEF&CC.
5. Shri H.C. Chaudhary, CCF (WL), Government of Meghalaya.
6. Dr. K. Gopinath, CCF, Anantapur, Government of Andhra Pradesh.
7. Shri N.K. Vasu, PCCF & CWLW, Government of Assam.
8. Shri Bharat Jyoti, CWLW, Government of Bihar.
9. Dr. R.K. Singh, PCCCF (WL), Government of Chhattisgarh.
10. Dr. Sandeep Tripathi, PCCF (WL), Government of Odisha.
11. Shri M.K. Rao, APCCF (WL), Government of Maharashtra.
12. Shri A.M. Sharma, CCF (WL), Government of Jhrkhand.
13. Dr. Dhanjai Mohan, APCCF (WL), Government of Uttarakhand.
14. Dr. Amit Mallick, APCCF (Admn.), Government of Kerala.

Copy to:-

1. PS to Hon'ble Minister, EF&CC.
2. PS to Hon'ble Minister of State, EF&CC.
3. PPS to Secretary, MoEF&CC.
4. PPS to DGF&SS, MoEF&CC.
5. PPS to ADGW(NTCA), MoEF&CC

Proceedings of the 14th Meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant, held at 12:00 Noon on 9th October, 2017 at Teesta Conference Hall, New Delhi

The 14th Meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant was held at 12:00 Noon on 9th October, 2017 at Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Dr. Mahesh Sharma, Hon'ble Union Minister of State, Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

List of participants is annexed.

The Hon'ble Minister welcomed members of the newly constituted Steering Committee and participants to the meeting. He stressed that a committee as important as the Steering Committee should meet at regular intervals and the discussions and decisions taken in its meetings should be used holistically for the purpose, it is created. The Steering Committee should direct its discussions to come up innovative solutions, which should be used by the policy makers for good governance. He also suggested creating a whatsapp group of the Steering Committee members to share their day to day experiences. He assured that Ministry shall reciprocate to the suggestions made by the members proactively. It was followed by self introduction by the members of the newly constituted steering committee and invitees to the meeting. Shri A. N. Jha, Secretary (EF&CC) joined the meeting later.

He then directed the Member Secretary of the Steering Committee to take up the agenda items of the meeting for deliberations by the members of the Steering Committee. Shri R K Srivastava, IGF and Director (Project Elephant) & Member Secretary of the Steering Committee gave a brief overview of various aspects of elephant conservation in the country through a power point presentation and took up agenda points for discussions.

Agenda Item No. 1: Confirmation of the minutes of the 13th meeting of the Steering Committee:

The minutes of the 13th meeting of the Steering Committee held on 17th December, 2014 were forwarded to all concerned on 8.01.15 revised proceedings, after receipt of comments from some members/ invitees were circulated on 10.02.15. As no further comments were received the minutes of the 13th meeting were confirmed.

Director (Project Elephant) presented a brief overview on the follow up actions taken on the decisions arrived during last meeting of the Steering Committee.

Agenda Item No. 2: Follow up Action on Decisions Taken in the 13th Meeting of the Steering Committee.

2.1: Conducting the All India Synchronized Elephant Census:

The Steering Committee was informed that for the first time in India an All India Synchronized Elephant Population Estimation, 2017 was conducted on were planned and scientific lines. The preparations for the elephant census operations were initiated one year prior to the actual population enumeration. The Project Elephant division started the planning and preparation of elephant census process in collaboration with Asian Nature Conservation Foundation (ANCF).

Elephants in India are concentrated in four regions namely (i) North Western, (ii) North Eastern, (iii) East Central and (iv) Southern. Synchronized census activities were taken up for each of the four regions. Two regional workshops were held in each region with help of ANCF. First workshop was for conducting dung decay experiments and second for actual elephant census. The All India Synchronized Elephant Census Report, 2017 (Preliminary) was released by the Hon'ble Minister, MoEF&CC on 12th August, 2017 on the occasion of World Elephant Day. The census data for entire country is being processed and All India Synchronized Elephant Census Report, 2017 (Final) will be released shortly.

2.2: Declaration of Elephant Reserves in Meghalaya:

The Government of Meghalaya was not able to notify Khasi Elephant Reserve, as most of the forest lands in the state are privately owned and State Government may not be able to acquire the land unless financial support for this purpose is provided by the Central Govt.

2.3: Declaration of Elephant Reserves of Karnataka:

The Govt. of Karnataka has notified inclusion of Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary under Mysore Elephant Reserve on 26th March, 2015. A new elephant reserve namely Dandeli Elephant Reserve has also been notified by State Govt. on the same date.

2.4: Death of elephants due to train hits:

The Committee was informed that Shri Shakti Prasad Nayak has filed a Writ Petition WP (C) No. 107 of 2013 in Supreme Court to issue directions to the Government to prevent death of elephants due to train hits. Hon'ble court in its hearing on 15.10.2015 expressed satisfaction on steps taken by the Government and progress made in this regard. Affidavits have also been filed by the Ministry to allow immuno-contraception of elephants on pilot basis to reduce Human Elephant Conflicts.

After receiving news reports regarding death of 18 elephants during last 5 months of the last year, DGF&SS have instructed CWLWs of elephant range states vide D.O. letter dated 28.12.16 to put their staff on high alert and take preventive actions to minimize elephant deaths /injuries. Hon'ble Minister, EF&CC has also written to Hon'ble Minister Railways on 10.01.2017 to look into incidences of elephant mortality due to train hits.

Secretary, MoEF&CC advised to collect and compile elephant mortality data and conduct year wise, sector wise analysis to identify the particular rail tracks, where train accidents were likely.

2.5: Constitution of Working Groups (i) Strengthening of Elephant Reserves and Corridors and (ii) Implementation of Recommendations of Gajah Report:

These two working groups were notified on 24th March, 2015 for a period of two years and one year respectively. Both working groups have met twice on 20.5.2015 and 23.3.2016. The term of the Working Group (i) is not yet over. The Working Group (ii) felt that many of the recommendations of Gajah report, 2010 are not relevant now. Hence it concentrated its efforts on development of "Guidelines of Human Elephant Conflicts", which have been issued on 6.10.2017. Human Elephant Conflict is one of the most critical issues in India and Gajah Report has also laid considerable importance on this issue.

2.6: Regulate migration of elephants to non-traditional areas and to minimize incidents and impacts of HEC:

The Working Group (ii) has examined the matter and such provisions have been incorporated on the Guidelines for Management of HEC issued on 6.10.2017.

The drafting committee for Strategic Region Action Plan for East Central Region has suggested landscape management and zonation approach for conservation of elephants. They have proposed three category of zones namely (i) Elephant Conservation Zone (ii) Co-existence Zone and (iii) Elephant Exclusion Zone.

2.7: Elephant Herds from Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary, causing damage to crops, houses & death/ injury to people and consequent retaliatory killing of elephants:

IGF (PE) informed that elephants from Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary in Jharkhand spread out all over the eastern region, comprising of Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, South Bengal and Northern Andhra Pradesh mostly due to degraded elephant habitat and mixed landscape. According to an estimate the region has 10% of country's elephant population and 70% of human mortality due to elephants.

To address this issue, it was decided that a "Regional Strategic Action Plan for Conservation of Elephants, with special emphasis on HEC" should be prepared through a Drafting Committee. The Drafting Committee has been notified on 02.01.2017, comprising of ADG (WL) as Chairman, elephant experts (Shri S.K. Patanaik, Shri S.S. Bist, Dr. R. Sukumar and Dr. D.S. Srivastava) and CWLWs of the region as members and IGF (PE) as Member Secretary. The Drafting Committee has met twice on 19.01.2017 and 06.09.2017. Rs. 7.00 lakhs and Rs. 7.50 lakhs has been released to Director, WII and ANCF for compilation of baseline data. Data collation by the two agencies has been completed and the format for the Report has been finalized in its last meeting.

2.8: Captive elephant welfare:

It was decided in the 13th Steering Committee meeting to look into the issues of (i) private elephant owners not taking proper care of their elephants and (ii) providing one time opportunity to elephant owners, for declaration of their elephants before CWLWs for seeking ownership certificates.

IGF (PE) informed that "Standards/Norms for Giving Recognition to Captive Elephant Housing Facilities, including temple elephants", in accordance with provisions of Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA), 1972 have been notified on 29.09.2017.

Hon'ble MEF&CC had approved relaxation of provisions under WLPA, 1972 to give one time opportunity to elephant owners, who could not apply for ownership within stipulated period, for making declaration before the CWLW for obtaining ownership certificate for their elephant. This will involve amendment of the WLPA, 1972. The matter has been referred to WL Division to take up during amendment of WLPA, 1972.

Shri Vinod Rishi pointed out that mahout skill is being lost, as new generation is reluctant to join this profession due to low wages and high risk involved. Systematic training of mahouts is essential for maintenance of captive elephants by State Forest Departments and other agencies.

Dr. K. K. Sharma informed that though elephant capture from the wild has been banned under WLPA, 1972. The stray cases of illegal captures and transfers of elephants are reported from time to time. There are many instances, where elephants of State Forest Departments (SFDs) have been impregnated by wild bulls leading to elephant births in captivity. These elephants can be trained for patrolling and other activities by SFDs. Assam Govt. has allowed selective capture of elephants from degraded and unviable elephant habitats.

The representative from Maharashtra SFD requested that the elephant tranquilizing (Immobilon) drug should be made available to them to deal with severe cases of HECs. IGF (PE) informed that Director, Nandankanan zoo has been designated as the nodal agency for procurement of tranquilizing drugs and its antidote. The CWLW, Odisha said that new rules and Acts have come into place to procure tranquilizing drug, hence there is a need to look into the issue afresh.

Agenda Item No. 3: Items suggested by Shri Vinod Rishi:

HEC Management

Shri Vinod Rishi expressed concern over the change in public attitude over passage of elephants through their area. He felt that elephants have the right to safe passage. When they move from one state to another, they should be allowed unrestricted movement. He stated that human – elephant conflict is increasing, but many a times this could be averted, if proper dialogue is established between the public and SFDs. He suggested that biologists and engineers should sit together and discuss, solutions to mitigate conflicts. He suggested construction of tunnels and

overpasses at suitable places, across national highways, railway lines, canals etc. The timing of traffic should be regulated to avoid heavy traffic jams.

Management Plan for Elephant Conservation

Shri Vinod Rishi pointed out that landscape approach is essential for effective conservation of elephants. As elephants are long ranging animals, the management plans for elephant reserves have to deal with multiple agencies and a mechanism needs to be developed to deal with multiple agencies for conservation of elephants. Non official members of the Steering Committee may play a role in working out integration of common management prescriptions for elephant conservation landscapes.

Agenda Item No. 4: Items suggested by Shri V. Gopinath:

Illegal Stock of Ivory:

Shri V. Gopinath informed that as per provisions of WIPA trade in ivory is illegal and major threat to survival of elephants. Elephant poaching is under control but captive elephants in private custody are a source of ivory for craftsmen. Kerala SFD has a ivory stockpile of 9MT. He said that there is no justification to maintain such huge stock and urged that SFDs may be directed to destroy ivory stock in their possession.

Shri P.K. Das, AS&FA suggested that Government museums may be allowed to display ivory articles made by rural artisans to save the craftsmanship and to provide employment to rural artisans. However, there was debate on if this could fuel the illegal trade in ivory. It was decided to introduce a system of ivory protocol to avoid pilferage of ivory stock from private as well as government stocks. Shri A.N. Jha, Secretary (EF&CC) observed that private elephants, particularly temple elephants, are an area of concern. He further expressed the concern that since there are very few cases of breeding of elephants in captivity, there may not be enough elephants to meet future requirements of SFDs. Dr. K.K. Sharma mentioned that breeding among captive elephants is quite healthy in Assam, particularly in areas close to forests.

Man Elephant Conflict:

Shri V. Gopinath said that incidents of HEC are on the rise and the population of captive elephants available with SFDs is also depleting fast. He proposed the need to examine the feasibility of reviving the old practice of elephant catching and training, in more scientific and humane ways, to meet long term demands of SFDs.

Rationalization of Elephant Reserves:

Shri V. Gopinath stated that unlike Protected Areas, many of the Elephant Reserves (ERs) were notified in a hurry, without rigorous process of scrutiny. He felt that SFDs should revisit the notifications of ERs and make necessary modifications, if necessary.

Agenda Item No. 5: Items suggested by Director, Wildlife Institute of India (WII):

Shri V. B. Mathur, Director (WII) made power point presentation on "Application of Advanced Intelligent Seismic Technology for Mitigating Threats to Wild Elephant Populations from Railway Tracks". He informed that the data on death of elephants due to train hits has been compiled. The first phase of the project on data compilation has been completed. He requested funding for the 2nd and 3rd phase of the project from the Ministry. It was decided that Director, WII should send a detailed proposal to the Ministry for further processing.

Shri Mathur also suggested that the present proposal by the Project Elephant Division to bring crop depredation by elephants within the ambit of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) may be pursued vigorously. He suggested that this issue should be taken up with Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare at highest level.

Shri Mathur informed that though the creation of 'Elephant Cell' was already approved in the 13th meeting of the Steering Committee, the Cell has not yet been created. He presented on the importance of the creation of the Cell which would give an impetus to the conservation of elephants. A working arrangement for coordination between the Ministry and WII for operating the Elephant Cell was discussed. The Ministry shall have National Coordinator to coordinate the task on elephant conservation of the Elephant Cell with WII. The proposal of Director, WII was accepted by the Steering Committee. The budget and the manpower allotment are to be finalized by the Ministry.

Agenda Item No. 6: Items suggested by Meghalaya FD:

Shri Harish Choudhury, CCF (WL), Meghalaya informed that the 2nd dialogue between India and Bangladesh was held at Shillong on 27.07.2017. Delegations from India and Bangladesh, headed by DGF&SS from India and CCF, Bangladesh, signed a document for conservation of elephants in two countries. The Agreed Point Actions on Trans-Boundary Conservation of Elephants in India- Bangladesh Landscape has been signed and agreed by two countries. Both countries have constituted Joint Working Group for developing a MoU and Protocol to be signed by two countries for effective conservation of elephants and mitigation of HEC. He requested if the points of actions agreed by the two countries could be vetted by MEA and MHA. IGF (PE) informed that as the MEA and MHA have already been approved the proposal for trans-boundary conservation of elephants across two countries, as such there is no need to raise this issue further with above Ministries again.

Agenda Item No. 6: Items suggested by Nagaland FD:

IGF (PE) on behalf of CWLW, Nagaland informed that the Govt. of Nagaland has requested for declaration of "Singhphan Elephant Reserve" in the state. The proposal of Govt. of Nagaland has been forwarded to Dr. K. K. Sharma, Member, Steering Committee, to examine ecological feasibility of declaration of Elephant Reserve. Dr. Sharma was requested to send his comments on the matter to the Ministry. He agreed to expedite the proposal.

To address Human- elephant conflict in Wokha district (50 villages), Mokokchung (2 villages) and Zuhenboto (4 villages) following trapping of wild elephants due to blockade / closure of elephant corridors between Assam and Nagaland workshops has been conducted by the State FD to allow passage of elephants from Nagaland to Assam. Assam FD responded that they shall discuss the matter with Nagaland FD and try to come up with solution. Dr. K. K. Sharma suggested to carry out research activities in the area. Shri. N. Vasu suggested making a committee involving both Assam and Nagaland FD to resolve the issue.

Agenda Item No. 7: Items suggested by Odisha FD:

CWLW, Odisha suggested that Solitary Elephant Dossier (SED) be prepared for problematic solitary Tusker/Makhana and radio collaring of problematic elephants. He felt that digital documentation of daily movement of elephant herds

through mobile application could help in elephant tracking. He suggested joint patrolling squads in border Divisions/States. He urged for steps to be taken by Ministry to declare elephant depredation as natural calamity. He requested that establishment of Baitarani Elephant Reserve and South Odisha Elephant Reserve and expansion of Sambalpur Elephant Reserve and Mahanadi Elephant Reserve.

Agenda Item No. 8: Items suggested by Bihar FD:

Bihar FD felt that the Trans – boundary movement of elephants between Nepal and India should be dealt with more proactively. Necessary dialogues should be taken up in the matter by the Ministry. IG (PE) requested Bihar FD to share necessary documents on trans-boundary movement of elephants between India and Nepal, which could be discussed in the CoP 12 meeting of CMS.

Agenda Item No. 9: Items suggested by Kerala FD:

Kerala FD requested the Ministry to liaise with Ministry of Railways to provide them scrap railway tracks to build infrastructures to prevent death of elephants due to train hits. It was decided that Ministry shall discuss the matter with Ministry of Railways.

The meeting ended with thanks to the Chair.