

Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
Wildlife Division

6th Floor, Vayu Wing
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,
Jor Bag Road, Aliganj,
New Delhi-110003

F. No. 6-62/2013 WL
Dated: 22nd December 2014

The Principal Secretary (Forests)
All States/Union Territory Governments.

Sub: Recommendation of the sub-committee on Guidelines for roads in Protected Areas.


Sir/Madam,

In pursuance to the decision taken by the Standing Committee of NBWL in its 28th meeting held on 20th March 2013, a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Dr. M.K. Ranjitsinh, member, NBWL was constituted. The sub-committee submitted their report to the Standing Committee in its meeting held on 4th September 2013. A copy of the report is enclosed herewith.

The Standing Committee agreed to adopt the guidelines and had requested the Chief Wildlife Wardens to submit their comments, if any, on the guidelines to the Ministry. The report of the sub-committee was circulated to the Chief Wildlife Wardens, all States/Union Territories vide letter of even no. dated 25th November 2013. Comments have been received from a few State/Union Territories. Subsequently, the matter was also considered in the 31st meeting of Standing Committee of NBWL held on 12-13 August 2014.

Based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife, in the last meeting dated 12th-13th August 2014, the undersigned is directed to convey the following clarifications regarding consideration of proposals for roads within Protected Areas:

- i. The principles provided in the report of the sub-committee have been adopted as generic principle.
- ii. New roads shall not be proposed inside National Parks and Sanctuaries.
- iii. The cases of resurfacing and strengthening of existing Highways, not involving widening within Protected Areas will be possible without reference to Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife.
- iv. Cases of widening, of the existing roads, if unavoidable due to reasons of purpose and alignment, could be placed before the Standing Committee, which shall consider such cases keeping in view the feasibility of mitigation measures irrespective of cost.

Yours faithfully,


(M.L. Srivastava)

Deputy Inspector General of Forests (WL)

Encl: As above.

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Copy to:

1. The Joint Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, Shipping, Government of India, transport Bhawan, New Delhi.
2. The Joint Secretary, I.A Division, MoEF&CC
3. The Inspector General of Forests (FC), MoEF&CC
4. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (WL), all States/Union Territories
5. The Chief Wildlife Warden, all States/Union Territories

M. L. Srivastava

(M.L. Srivastava)

Deputy Inspector General of Forests (WL)

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Recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Guidelines for Roads in Protected Areas.

In pursuance to the decision taken by the Standing Committee of the NBWL in its 28th Meeting held on 20th March 2013, a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Dr. M.K. Ranjitsinh, Member, National Board for Wildlife, was constituted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests vide O.M. No. 6-62/2013-WL dated 26th June 2013. The terms of reference of the sub-committee are as follows:

- To frame a comprehensive guideline for construction/repair of roads passing through PA in the country
- Design best practices for such roads passing through PAs so as to have better wildlife conservation

The 1st meeting of the sub-committee was convened on 2nd July, 2013. The second meeting of the sub-committee was convened on 6th August, 2013. The list of participants who attended both the meetings are given in **Annexure-1**.

PREAMBLE

Background

Roads are an essential part of India's development, providing vital connectivity and transportation across the country. Yet, when they intersect natural areas (as opposed to being situated in already-modified human-dominated landscapes), roads have wide-ranging and complex impact on natural areas and wild species inhabiting these areas. Within India's Protected Areas, the extensive impact of roads remains poorly understood, except in the obvious and serious instance of wild animal mortality due to road accidents. Elsewhere, it was well-established that roads have detrimental ecological effects in both terrestrial and aquatic natural ecosystems. Roads further fragment the already highly fragmented natural habitats. They break forest contiguity, impinge on forests and well-worn migratory paths of animals, break tree cover and canopy, slice vegetation—all of which gravely impact wildlife. Roads cause soil erosion and landslides. Crucially, roads are the first step to ancillary development and an increasing human footprint in the area, thus leading to

accelerated developmental, tourist and hunting pressures, increase in pollution, litter, and various disturbances. Unless great vigilance and checks are provided, roads provide conduits for illegal extraction of timber and forest produce and for poaching, particularly at night, from vehicles. It is very difficult to provide the requisite surveillance and it is well-established that PAs have suffered loss of vegetative cover and poaching after construction of roads. In PAs in the mountainous region, construction of roads and their widening has grave consequences, including landslides and erosion, as the debris from road cuts on hillsides is invariably tipped over the sides. A background paper on linear intrusions into natural areas, including roads, commissioned by the National Board for Wildlife in 2011, provides an exhaustive review of the current state of knowledge on this topic¹, and a companion document² provides detailed guidelines by which their negative impact on natural habitats and wild species, can be minimised.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

We wish to reiterate a point articulated clearly and emphatically in the **National Wildlife Action Plan – 2002-2016**, which states that the *"Ministry of Surface Transport... to plan roads, highways, expressways in such a manner that all national parks and sanctuaries are by-passed and integrity of the PA is maintained. Wildlife corridors also need to be avoided, or mitigative measures (such as restricting night traffic) need to be employed."* This principle must serve as the cornerstone of any road plan that is being conceived in the vicinity of any wildlife or Protected Area, and envisages the Ministry of Surface Transport to work in coordination with the Ministry of Environment & Forests, and other relevant authorities and experts. Further, we believe that this principle must apply to all other roads being planned by any other agency at the national, state, or local levels. The implication of this action point articulated in the National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) is also that plans be made proactively by relevant agencies to realign existing roads passing through protected areas, in a way that PAs are bypassed and, subsequently, decommission roads that intersect PAs.

¹ Raman, T. R. S. 2011. Framing ecologically sound policy on linear intrusions affecting wildlife habitats: Background paper for the National Board for Wildlife. Available from: envfor.nic.in/assets/Linear%20intrusions%20background%20paper.pdf

² NBWL. 2011. Draft guidelines for linear infrastructure intrusions in natural areas: roads and powerlines. Available from: <http://envfor.nic.in/assets/FIRSTDraft%20guidelines%20roads%20and%20powerlines.pdf>

If there are viable alternative alignments—as observed in a number of cases—to roads that otherwise intersect PAs, those within PAs must gradually be phased out and eventually decommissioned, while the alternate road should be improved. This must be done in active coordination with the relevant ministries, departments and authorities, as noted above.

In planning roads, within and in the vicinity (defined here as roads that are situated inside and within 1 km radial distance) of protected areas, we recommend that following fundamental principles must be followed in order of priority: Avoidance, Realignment, Restoration.

1. **Principle of Avoidance:** The foremost option would be to altogether avoid areas that are within or in the vicinity of any Protected Area and to find alternatives that are socially and ecologically more appropriate.
2. **Principle of Realignment:** This follows as a corollary of the first principle. Road projects must investigate and demonstrate that they have considered other alternative routes that avoid natural areas of high ecological value. This must be an integral feature of a project proposal and implementation documents. Realignments must also be developed in a transparent manner through consultation with local communities affected by the routing and subject to ecological and wildlife considerations.

User agencies seeking clearances for roads must demonstrate as to how they have taken these factors into account, before their proposals can be considered for approval by the SC-NBWL.

3. **Principle of Restoration:** In natural areas, existing roads that are in disuse (e.g., old logging roads), or evaluated to be inefficient or detrimental to their objects, shall be targeted for decommissioning and subsequent ecological restoration, as the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed.

The Deputy Inspector General of Forests (WL) briefed the committee regarding the existing guidelines for roads within Protected Areas, viz.:

- (i) Decision of the Standing Committee of IBWL, as per decision taken during the meeting held on 14.6.2000. This held that roads that have already been tarred should continue to be maintained and repaired properly, in the current form. No roads inside the National Parks and Sanctuaries should be widened or upgraded.
- (ii) During the meeting of 14th October 2011, it indicated that “No widening of existing roads shall be permitted, and the status of finishing of the surface of the repaired road(s) shall remain same as that of the original road(s), i.e.,

