

Executive Summary: Audit report—Rajasthan: Protection of forests and Wildlife in Rajasthan)

1) Background

Forest are among the most diverse and widespread ecosystem on the earth. They support biodiversity like animals, plants, microorganisms etc. The forests of Rajasthan are rich in flora and fauna with about 3000 known species of plants and animals and they cover 4.7% of total geographical area. Land use patterns have been showing a decrease in forest land cover and increase in desert land stated in the Rajasthan State Environment Policy, 2010. Rajasthan has a protected area network of 9620.04 sq. km. around, comprising of three National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and six conservation reserves.

2) Audit Objectives and Criteria

The audit objectives were to assess:

- Measures taken to protect forests and wildlife through the protected area network;
- Measures taken to protect forests and wildlife outside the protected area network;
- Compliance to rules and regulations in cases of diversion of forests land for development activities;
- Utilization of funds for protection of forests and wildlife were done economically and effectively.
- Measures taken for protection of traditional ecological knowledge and biodiversity.

Audit criteria were derived from Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972; Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980; Rajasthan State Environment Policy, 2010; Rajasthan State Forest Policy, 2010; National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP),(2002-16); Biological Diversity Act (BDA), 2002 etc.

3) Audit Findings

- The final notification of Sariska as National Park has not been issued as of December 2012. Thus, Sariska could not be declared as a National Park and as such, adequate protection measures for wildlife specially tigers, were not put in place.
- State Government had declared only six Conservation Reserves so far and no Community Reserve has been declared (March 2012). AS a result, a scientific approach/plan for conservation and protection of black buck, chinkaras and other species which are endemic to this region, could not be made.
- It was observed that the State Government had approved a proposal (January 2012) to connect Ranthambhore Tiger Project, Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary, Sawai Mansingh WS, Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary, Jawahar Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary and Mukundra hills National Park as corridor namely "Rajeev Gandhi Biosphere Reserve Corridor", a management unit to ensure safe roaming of wild animals like tigers. However, the corridor still had not been created, putting at risk, movement of wild animals from one protected area to another.
- It was observed that State Government sent to the Government of India (GoI), a recovery plan of Rs. 34.35 crore for development of the core area, constructing enclosures, pasture and infrastructure

developments for GIB (The Great Indian Bustard, an endangered bird, state bird of Rajasthan), approval of which was awaited (May 2012). GoI, however, released Rs. 1.05 crore to the State Government during 2008-09 to 2011-12. Audit observed that though funds were spent on these activities, population of GIB had decreased (73 in 2008 and 52 in 2011), due to ineffective measures/plans for protection/conservation of GIB.

- Out of 3,162 sq km area notified by the State Government for Desert National Park, Jaisalmer Wildlife Sanctuary, only 50.76 sq km area, (two per cent of the park area) was actually forest land and the rest was private, Government and revenue land. Besides, 73 villages were situated within the Wildlife park area resulting in biotic pressure, habitat interference and fragmented habitats.
- State Highway- 13 and SH-29A passed through core area of Tiger Project Sariska. Supreme Court of India had directed (May 2009) to stop movement of commercial vehicles on SH-13 and instead pass the traffic through the bye-pass road and close SH-29A to traffic; however this did not take place. Death of five wild animals due to accidents was also recorded from 2009 to 2011.
- The Policy states that Sloth Bear population in South Western parts of Aravallis needs to be protected by declaring the area as a sanctuary, especially Jaswantpura hills in Jalore district. It was observed that no sanctuary was declared for protection of Sloth Bear.
- An amendment to WPA, 1972 in 2006 provided for setting up of Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) at the Central level, which would coordinate with the State Governments in the area of wildlife crimes. State Government in its Policy proposed establishment of State Wildlife Crime Bureau (SWCB) to tackle wildlife related crimes, intelligence gathering and speedy investigation of wildlife crimes. It was observed that the State Government has not set up SWCB as of November 2012. Failure to setup SWCB impacted intelligence gathering and speedy investigation of wildlife crimes which led to huge pendency of wildlife crime cases.

4) Recommendations

- The State Government should strengthen the mechanism to prevent illegal mining/encroachment on forest land and the internal controls to check cases of diversion of forest land to non-forest uses. For effective deterrence and punishment of wildlife offences, the State Government should set up State Wildlife Crime Bureau as soon as possible.
- Programmes should be initiated for protection of habitats of critically endangered species in Rajasthan like Great Indian Bustard, Gharial, Sloth Bear etc. so that, these vulnerable species do not get extinct in Rajasthan.
- The State Government should take effective steps to build up data base for biological resources and traditional knowledge and ensure protection of rights including intellectual property rights over biological resources and associated knowledge.
- The State Government should utilize the receipts of eco-development surcharge collected for eco-development activities in National Parks and Sanctuaries.

Source:

http://saiindia.gov.in/english/home/Our_Products/Audit_Report/Government_Wise/state_audit/recent_reports/Rajasthan/2013/Report_1/Chapter%202.pdf