

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Forest and Wildlife Department Government of Haryana proposes to formulate Eco-Tourism Policy applicable to the State of Haryana. The main objective of the proposed policy is to promote the Eco-Tourism activities in the state by conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems, heritage monuments, culture and traditions of the Haryana involving local community. The Draft policy is uploaded on the Haryana Forest Department website www.haryanaforest.gov.in for seeking comments, views of the general public and other stakeholders.

Any person (s) interested in making any suggestions, views and objections on the proposal contained in the draft policy may forwarded the same in writing within a period of three weeks through e-mail to Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Budget, Planning and Project Formulation) Van Bhavan, Sector-6, Panchkula on email- apccfbudget.hry@gmail.com.

Place: Panchkula

 21.10.2021
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests(HoFF)

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Haryana, Panchkula.

DRAFT POLICY ON DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-TOURISM IN HARYANA

1. Preamble:

The geographical area of Haryana is small, yet the State is endowed with a very rich spectrum of geography, landscapes, forests, wildlife, wetlands, community reserves, conservation reserves, heritage and cultural diversity. It is also home to several endangered species of flora and fauna. The State has vast potential to become a premier eco- tourism destination.

Haryana is approximately 1.4 % of geographical area of India. Around 3.5 % of this land is under the administrative control of the Forest Department, with 2 National Parks, 7 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 2 Ramsar Sites, 2 Conservation Reserves, 5 Community Reserves and many niche faunal habitats in addition to vast expanse of desert ecosystem, the old Aravalli hill range, Shivalik Hills, rich biodiversity, dense forests, host of water bodies and scenic places. The State offers the most amazing and unique canvas for those interested in mingling with the elements of nature.

In recent years there has been an increasing trend in eco-tourism. Many tourists now prefer to visit natural places that are blessed with the beautiful, pleasant and stress relieving environment. Adoption of environment friendly practices, protection of natural resources and cultural heritage and creation of livelihood opportunities are the important prescriptions of eco-tourism.

2. Eco- Tourism:

In a broader sense, Eco-tourism is a form of tourism involving visitation to fragile, pristine and relatively undisturbed natural area, intended as a low impact and small-scale alternative to standard commercial mass tourism.

It also means responsible travel to natural areas and a learning opportunity for understanding the need to conserve the environment and improving the well-being of the local people. Following are widely accepted definitions of eco-tourism -

'Eco-tourism may be defined as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people' (TIES).

'Tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified objects of studying, admiring, and enjoying nature and its wild plants and animals, as well as existing cultural aspects found in these areas' (WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION).

The definitions focus on three significant aspects - nature, tourism and local communities. The mass tourism generally results in consuming nature and leaving it depleted on more than one fronts, whereas Eco tourism aims at promoting environmental values and ethics and preserving nature in its uninterrupted forms. Eco-tourism, thus benefits wildlife and nature by contributing towards ecological integrity.

National Forest Policy, 1988 and State Forest Policy, 2006 also calls for building a people's movement for protecting natural forest as national heritage with focus on conservation of natural resources through awareness building, diversification of tourism activities and destinations, and local community participation and synergy with general development of tourism sector. Hence, there is a need of having a policy document that enables, certifies and facilitates the efforts of the tourism sector in a manner which is eco-friendly in natural areas.

This Haryana Eco-Tourism Policy is aimed at informing and sensitizing the general public and related Government Departments towards eco-

tourism and laying down the framework for its growth in the State in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable manner.

3. Vision and Mission:

The vision of this policy is to preserve and protect the natural and cultural heritage of Haryana and to provide opportunities to enhance livelihood of local communities, generate resources for sustainable development and promote greater understanding and appreciation for natural heritage through eco-friendly initiatives.

The mission of the policy is to promote ecological conservation in Haryana, to encourage and develop unique, high quality, low impact eco-tourism destinations, to foster quality educational experience, promoting better understanding of nature and to empower local communities through creation of livelihood opportunities and capacity building.

4. Objectives:

The main objectives of Haryana Eco- Tourism Policy are as follows:

- a) Conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems, heritage monuments, culture and traditions of the Haryana;
- b) Promote bio-diversity, traditional ecological knowledge's and heritage values of Haryana's wilderness.
- c) Promote engagement of local communities in nature tourism in a manner that enriches local economy and encourages sustainable use of indigenous materials through financially viable value chains thereby helping such communities become *Atma Nirbhar*.
- d) Provide opportunities to local communities to determine the appropriate presentation of their cultural values by obtaining their

informed consent and full participation in planning and management of eco-tourism activities;

- e) Develop and setting up of standards and norms for eco-tourism activities;
- f) Awareness building amongst general public; local communities and government staff about eco-tourism;
- g) Enunciate mechanism for securing partnership of private sector enterprise committed to the goals of eco-tourism for development of infrastructure and services;
- h) Encourage partnership between local communities, NGOs, Eco-clubs, academic institutions as well as private enterprises/ businesses and the State Government Departments like Forest, Tourism, Agricultural, Fisheries, Irrigation, Culture and Public Works Department for development of eco-tourism.

5. Principles:

The development, management and promotion of eco-tourism in the State shall be governed by the following guiding principles:

- (i) Eco-tourism facilitation within the forest and wildlife areas will be a part of the management plan / working plan of the unit. The eco-tourism plan will provide for identified locations/ routes for visitation, permissible activities, permissible time for visit and means of travel. Delineation of inviolate space in the area and seasonal requirements will be specified in the Plan.
- (ii) Eco-tourism plans for target destinations shall be conservation centric.
- (iii) It is essential that management of eco-tourism facilitates primarily vests on the local communities as the principal stakeholders. Thus, the

benefits flowing from the visitation in the area must also accrue to the local communities by way of livelihood opportunities arising from eco-tourism. This will reinforce their interface and sense of ownership. However, the communities on their own are usually not able to harness the eco-tourism potential due to limited resources and knowhow, therefore partnering with other stakeholders becomes important. The policy would facilitate such partnering for a win-win situation for the stakeholders.

- (iv) Natural profile and ecological integrity of forest and wildlife areas, along with their biodiversity values shall be maintained. Infrastructure for eco-tourism will be so designed that it merges with the ambient environment. The construction will utilise local resources and minimise use of cement concrete as far as possible. Temporary tents, Wooden Structures, Removable pre-fabricated structures having cement and tile flooring without deep foundation would be desirable.
- (v) The activities will be eco-friendly and no permanent structures will be established. The stipulations contained in Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 shall be adhered to meticulously. All eco-tourism activities shall be in conformity with the existing environmental laws of the country, including Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, the Environment Protection Act, 1986, the Environment (Protection) rules 1986 and rules for Eco sensitive zones, Haryana Tourism Policy 2020, directives of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and National Green Tribunal.
- (vi) Construction works like permanent buildings for camps, camping complexes with lodging/ boarding structures, helipads, new roads, tourist bungalows/ commercial lodges etc. for eco-tourism purpose

within forest areas shall be allowed only after getting clearance under Forest (Conservation) Act.

- (vii) Infrastructure outside Protected Areas will also be developed in eco-friendly manner so that those merge with the surroundings. The extent of infrastructure development will be limited to the carrying capacity of the area.
- (viii) Considering that the local livelihood improvement is one of the expected outcomes of eco-tourism, home stay based hospitality enterprises will be encouraged.
- (ix) Only activities and facilities having least impact on the natural resources and the local culture be permitted. Preference should be given to use the already existing infrastructural facilities available in the area rather than creating a new one.
- (x) The economic returns from eco-tourism activities shall be ploughed back for conservation and development of natural resources of that area. For this purpose, a suitable fund management system will be developed.
- (xi) Creation of environmental awareness amongst all sections and age groups, especially the youth, be incorporated as a major activity for each eco-tourism destination.
- (xii) Marketing strategies be based on sound market research and segmentation analysis, making wide use of electronic, print and cyber media for marketing Haryana Eco-tourism as a multi-faceted eco-tourism destination and will be developed as per the overall eco-tourism master plan of the state.

- (xiii) Installation of technologically efficient systems including non-conventional energy sources be adopted for operation of eco-tourism facilities.
- (xiv) Multi stakeholder partnership in developing and operating facilities and activities to be encouraged. Development and operations to be undertaken either solely by the government agency concerned or in partnership with the local community and private enterprises, depending upon the specific requirements and the category under which the destination area falls.
- (xv) Technical co-operation with national and international agencies having expertise in eco-tourism to be encouraged, without compromising on local interests. Experiences of other states should also be considered and suitably incorporated for operationalization of this policy.
- (xvi) The Policy will be applicable to all types of notified forest lands in the state and areas covered under Punjab Land Preservation Act wherever the owners of such lands become partners in the projects.
- (xvii) As eco-tourism aims at experiencing of natural areas while fostering environmental and cultural understanding, and encouraging preservation of wildlife and forests, is a responsible form of tourism. Therefore, the State shall endeavour to identify eco-tourism with forestry activities so that necessary and meaningful development can take place within the sites for benefit of eco-tourists and local people.
- (xviii) Considering that improvement of local livelihood is one of the expected outcomes of eco-tourism. homestay based hospitality enterprises be encouraged.

6. Implementation Strategy:

The stated objectives of the Policy will be achieved through following strategies:

6.1 Institutional Arrangement: The Haryana Eco-Tourism Development Society will be constituted at the State level to act as an Apex body. The society shall advice in achieving the vision, mission and objectives of Eco-tourism Policy with regard to forests, protected areas and other natural areas not directly under the control of the Forest Department. The Society shall be headed by the Hon'ble Forest Minister of Haryana and assisted by the officers of Forest Department, Tourism Department and other stakeholder departments. The Society will further ensure the involvement of viable community-based models of eco-tourism by making sure that the 'community' is well-defined and incrementally empowered (both in terms of skills and financial resources) to eventually become self-sustaining.

- (ii) At the District level, a District Level Eco-tourism Committee (DLEC) shall be constituted under the Chairmanship of the District Collector with Deputy Conservator of Forests (Territorial) as the Member Secretary and shall have members from other stakeholder departments like revenue, tourism, rural development, agriculture etc. to promote, manage and develop eco-tourism sites. The DLEC will be free to invite opinion from the experts in the field of tourism and hospitality sectors on matters related to development of eco-tourism in their districts. The DLEC shall work towards promoting community-based entrepreneurship to strengthen conservation of natural and cultural biodiversity and sustainable management of eco-tourism sites.

6.2 Eco- Tourism Partners.

In order to realize the eco-tourism potential of the destinations, it is imperative that the agencies partnering in the initiative have clarity

about their roles, responsibilities and obligations. The main partners in the eco-tourism initiative would be **the owner** who owns the facility, the **person or eco-tourist** visiting the area for experience, the **operator** or private entrepreneur who is managing the eco-tourism destination, and the **facilitator** guide or interpreter, who will be providing the interpretation, guidance and other intellectual inputs regarding the destination to make the experience memorable; the **local community** who will be the main beneficiary of the initiative and the **Government (Forest and Tourism departments)** who are leveraging the interdependencies of the partners to make the conservation initiatives successful.

6.3 Development of standards and certifications.

With multi-stakeholder involvement, maintenance of quality of services and experience of the visitors is very important for development of eco-tourism in the State as well for meeting the overall objectives of the policy. It is therefore imperative to develop standards of various services and components of eco-tourism regarding infrastructure, basic facilities, safety, courtesies, conservation education etc. in addition to aspects like carrying capacity. Standards and system of certification would be developed to incentivise operators and facilitators to improve the quality in eco-tourism services and experience.

6.4 Identification of Potential Sites:

- a) Potential sites will be identified jointly by Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation and Department of Tourism and will be prioritized for phased development.
- b) Criterion for selection of project site would be its nearness to the tourist destination, its economic viability and enthusiasm and

willingness of local communities to preserve its nature and man-made heritage.

6.5 Eco-Tourism Activities:

Eco-tourism activities to be identified and developed at any destination shall be site-specific i.e., dependent upon the potential of the particular site being developed based on sound eco-tourism principals. Following are the activities and facilities that may be undertaken for promoting an area as an eco-tourism destination within the State.

a) Educational Tours and excursions:

Educational tours of various durations for school and college students may be organised to learn about the Ecology, Forest Eco-systems, forest types, geology and geography of area, wildlife habitat, soil and water conservation measures, medicinal plants, cultural heritage etc. Visitation to vulture conservation centre, Elephant Rehabilitation Centre, Zoos etc. can be included under this activity.

b) Nature Camps:

Camping sites may be identified and provided with basic facilities to enable the tourists to stay in natural surroundings either solely to experience the wilderness or additionally for participating in other activities requiring overnight stay in forests.

c) Eco-friendly Accommodation

Adequate facilities for boarding and lodging of tourists may be developed. The infrastructure must be eco-friendly and strictly in accordance with guidelines laid down in this regard. Suitable existing buildings, located in picturesque locations, may also be developed for tourist accommodation. Where feasible, local community members

may also be encouraged to provide lodging and boarding facilities to the tourists, subject to prescribed quality standards. The home stay facilities will also be encouraged to provide livelihood support to the local peoples.

d) Trekking and Nature Walks:

Trekking routes of varying distances and guided nature trails through designated paths may be identified and developed in scenic landscapes rich in biodiversity, causing minimum disturbance to the natural vegetation and soil. Staff and local persons, especially youth may be appropriately trained to act as Nature Guides and Naturalists so as to assist visitors during wildlife viewing and trekking.

e) Wildlife Viewing:

Wildlife viewing in eco-friendly vehicles or safari's may be promoted at appropriate sites for observing wildlife in National Parks and Wildlife sanctuaries. Sites having suitable water-bodies attracting resident as well as migratory birds may be developed.

f) Adventure Sports:

Facilities for adventure sports such as trekking, cycle riding, rock climbing, river crossing, paragliding, bungee jumping, treeline hanging bridge crossing and boating etc. may be developed in consultation and cooperation with experts and the concerned department or agency having control over the land or facility.

g) Angling:

Angling facilities for suitable fish species, strictly on a catch and release basis, may be developed on suitable rivers/ water bodies flowing through or along the forest areas in consultation with the

concerned Department. Angling guidelines should be formulated and strictly followed. If necessary, water bodies may be artificially stocked by rearing and releasing fish seeds into the rivers that have been depleted of the target species over time. The water harvesting dams constructed in Shivalik area may be used for the purpose.

h) Herbal Eco-tourism:

Herbal eco-tourism may be made the thrust area at suitable locations having a rich herbal heritage. Traditional medicinal practices of such locations may be explored and based on these authentic herbal products having appropriate certifications and recognition may be made available to the tourists. The herbal vatika's developed in Morni area and Herbal parks developed by Department may be utilized under the component.

i) Medical and Health Activities

To promote the AYUSH system of medical treatment, centre for Ayurveda facilities like Herbal massage, Panchkarma, Sirodhara, Mud therapy etc. may be established at suitable locations.

j) Religious and Cultural Eco-Tourism:

It can be promoted through establishment of religious vatika's like Navgrah Vatika, Nakshatra Vatika, Rashi Vatika, Panchvati Vatika, Tirthankar Vatika, Saptrishi Vatika etc. The existing heritage site and religious places can be identified to promote these activities. The local bazar or haat may also be established to promote the local products of the area and enhance livelihood support to local community.

k) Visitor Interpretation Centres and Conservation Education:

Existing interpretation facilities may be strengthened to make them more comprehensive to accommodate the requirements of various classes of visitors targeted. Each destination must incorporate ways to enhance and enrich the visitor experience.

Conservation education to be promoted in and around each destination for creating awareness amongst school and college students, local communities, government staff and visitors in order to maintain and enhance support for eco-tourism and environmental conservation. Various means that may be adopted include providing services of naturalists (guides), media campaigns, formation of eco- clubs at schools and colleges, exposure visits to destinations, displays and hoardings, community centres etc. New and innovative methods shall also be encouraged.

1) Other Facilities

Facilities for any other eco-friendly activities may also be provided based on specific requirements of a site provided the activity is compatible with the overall objectives of this policy and in conformance with the various standards and guidelines laid down in this regard.

6.6 Eco-Tourism Development Plan

An Eco Tourism Management Plan for each district (including the wildlife and non-wildlife areas) will be prepared at the district level by the District Level Eco-Tourism Committee. It will be a document expressing the stakeholder's recommendations for how eco-tourism is to be carried out in the areas falling under their jurisdiction. The Eco- Tourism Management Plan will be prepared in consonance with the working plan/ management plan of the areas falling in the jurisdiction of that Circle and in consultation with the stakeholders

and it will determine the kind of eco-tourism activity that is desirable for a particular area. The objective of the plan is to develop eco-tourism in a managed manner and not serve as a regulatory document.

The Eco-Tourism Management Plan will be perspective plan of five years and will give details of interventions such as requirement of infrastructure, development of activities such as eco-lodges, eco-sports, nature trails, trekking, safaris, home-stays etc. The activities at such eco-tourism sites shall be identified based on the potential and carrying capacity of the site.

The Eco-Tourism Management Plan shall contain the following component strategies: - (i) Zoning for visitor use, (ii) Visitor Site planning and design, (iii) Sustainable infrastructure design, (iv) Determination of the Carrying Capacity, (v) Visitor management, (vi) Revenue generation and accounting, (vii) Roles of forest department, private operator, facilitators and the local community, (viii) Education & interpretation, and (ix) Monitoring & Evaluation component.

Support of expert agencies can be taken while development of such plan so that they are relevant and of high quality. A due process for approval of the Eco-Tourism Development Plan will be decided, and the plan once approved will be fit for implementation by the District Level Eco-Tourism Development Committee. The plan would be revised periodically to reflect new opportunities and needs.

6.7 Funding Support:

(a) Consistent and regular fund flow will be required for identification, development, operationalization, running, maintenance and marketing of eco-tourism initiatives. The Forest Department shall allocate funds from annual departmental budget available under various schemes for development of eco-tourism. The funds will then be provided to the district units on the basis of the

approved annual action plans of each site. Apart from budgetary support State and District Level Eco-Tourism Societies will also be free to raise funds, grants, donations etc., loans from other sources to meet the requirement for eco-tourism initiatives. The larger objective of government funding to eco-tourism projects is to provide initial support and resources with the expectation that many of these projects would become sustainable subsequently. Efforts should always be to explore this aspect at the conceptualization and design stage.

(b) In addition to the government funding income from eco-tourism activities would be ploughed back in the venture for asset or working capital needs.

6.8 Revenue Sharing Mechanism:

(a) Considering that eco-tourism is also an economic activity, it is important that the eco-tourism plan incorporates a feasible revenue sharing mechanism for the stakeholders. A revenue sharing mechanism would be implemented for eco-tourism sites which have been developed or are managed in partnership with private entities. The revenue share of government would be demarcated for community development, conservation initiatives and development of eco-tourism in new sites.

(b) In cases where eco-tourism is being carried out by Department or community organisations, the funds accrued from eco-tourism activities will be ploughed back for development of eco-tourism. A part of the funds would be demarcated for community development and conservation initiatives.

6.9 Eco-Tourism Promotion, Publicity and Marketing.

Pricing and appropriate packaging and branding of eco-tourism destination is important for the success of eco-tourism. The marketing of eco-tourism destination requires dissemination strategies and the aid of digital technology and other conventional means. The Haryana Eco-Tourism

Development Society shall provide a platform for effective marketing, branding and promotion including through internet based technologies, which shall also provide information for online booking of facilities. The tie up with organizations, entities, tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers etc. shall be established for promotion of eco-tourism. The services of print and electronic media will be utilized for popularizing of eco-tourism hot spots and potential sites. The marketing of eco-tourism destination requires establishment of a cell and networking with the Tourism Department and other departments, branding of products and evolving marketing strategies and dissemination through media.

The Society shall also provide support for research and development of eco-tourism products. The eco-tourism sites identified and developed will have its uniqueness and values in terms of aesthetic, natural, cultural and landscape characteristics which will be recognized and developed into an eco-tourism product with which the site will be recognized. The product developed will cater to different target groups and will include hiking, trekking, wildlife sighting, bird watching trails, boating, photography, visit to medicinal plants conservation area, craft making, agricultural products, local handicraft, promoting festivals, interpretation centre visit and adventure sports. In the wetland /riverine sites, activities like walks and boat rides for viewing and appreciating the rich and special flora and fauna can be taken up.

6.10 Capacity Building

The capacity of different stakeholders, especially the eco-tourism site managers, field staff and the local communities, needs to be steadily up scaled to innovate and meet the present and future requirements of the sector. The policy envisages providing opportunities to local communities by provisioning for specialized training on management of such destinations. Field functionaries will also be imparted specialized training on management of Eco-tourism activities. Capacities of local communities will be built to provide various

services such as nature guides, hospitality management services etc. This will be achieved by taking the assistance of Tourism Department and the services of Hospitality Management Institutes. This shall include trainings to discharge specialized tasks such as tourist guides, natural science interpreters, patrol partners for protection work, entrepreneurs for small scale homestead-based hospitality industry, small business operators (like souvenir shops, equipment for hire, photography) etc.

6.11 Community Development:

The endeavour would be to extend maximum benefit to local communities either in form of employment generation or resources creation. The local communities will be encouraged to come forward to take up various economic or promotional activities for furthering the vision and aims of this policy. The Haryana Eco-Tourism Development Society along with related departments would take necessary steps in this regard.

6.12 Coordination Mechanism:

The State Govt. will aim to achieve necessary linkages and synergies in the policies and programmes of all concerned departments/ agencies by establishing effective coordination mechanism at the state and district levels. Linkages with other policies/programs of the state govt. will also be established.

6.13 Development and Management of Eco-Tourism Assets:

- (i) The State already boasts of a few eco-tourism facilities and nature awareness centres. It shall be the endeavour to bring all the facets of such assets in to a common fold under the aegis of the Institutional arrangements envisaged in this policy.
- (ii) Eco-tourism circuits shall be created which will allow the visitors to access the existing infrastructures related to Eco-tourism.

- (iii) Wherever feasible, the Society shall facilitate selection of partners for eco-tourism sites in Public Private Partnership with due approvals and adherence to applicable laws.
- (iv) District level units shall endeavour to facilitate outreach to educational institutions and tie up with them for organizing camps in eco-tourism nature camps under its aegis.
- (v) The Eco-tourism facilities developed by Department without prior approval under Forest Conservation Act, 1980 will be regularized after taking necessary permission from the competent authority.

6.14 Education and Interpretation:

For effective use of the eco-tourism potential of the area, the management has to work on an effective education and interpretation plan. The visitors must be sensitized on the significance of conservation and expected behavioural requirements while they are within the eco-tourism area. For this purpose, an effective eco-tourism site specific communication plan would be developed which include providing crucial information to the tourists to appreciate the eco-system services and other benefits provided by the area. As part of the implementation of the interpretation plan, electronic visual tools, well equipped interpretation centre, appropriate signage's, audio-visual presentation centres, interactive learning tools, safety protocol and information material on the area for the visitors should be installed at the strategic locations.

6.15 Impact assessment and Monitoring:

Eco-tourism plans will invariably include a dynamic monitoring mechanism covering number of tourists visiting and the pattern, their level of satisfaction, extent involvement of local people, scope for improvement, etc. Impact assessment studies and feedback from tourists would be carried out at periodic intervals so as to ascertain impacts of eco-tourism activities on

environment and local communities. Based on studies appropriate measures would be taken. This will facilitate responding to and management of growth and in eco-tourism on aspects like visitation management, hospitality facilities in neighbourhood, security arrangements and so on.
