

Recently, in the month of April 2008, a workshop was held in Gwalior to help preparation of the management plan of Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary and Forest Division.

Four broad topics important for developing the management plan of Kuno were discussed in greater detail, and it was found that the Ecological Monitoring and Research Centre in Kuno had a significant role to play in order to facilitate a research based management. The four major topics discussed at length were reintroduction of Asiatic lions, habitat and prey management, relocated villages, and ecotourism. Various aspects within these broad topics needed research support, which is where the EMRS was found as a useful support. The following subheads required immediate intervention from the EMRS, to which, a systematic research plan has been prepared and timelines have been set:

1. Survey of reptiles, small mammals and birds to help prepare the management plan.

2. Analysis of the fire regime in Kuno WLS to prepare a fire protocol ensuring that the area does not lose its characteristic species.

3. Estimation of the feral cattle population and their demography so that a population model could be developed predicting their status and hence impact in the future.

4. Identification, estimation of extent and abundance of the weeds in relocated village sites with and without heavy impact of feral cattle, so that a natural species composition of grass and shrubs is achieved in areas with extensive weed and feral cattle impact.

5. Developing the buffer map of the road network and model it with data on disturbance, hunting and fire to identify areas where a better network of forest roads is required to be built.

6. Support to the Park Management in developing the protocol and other prerequisites for reintroduction of the Asiatic Lion initially from captive stock.

EIA Resource and Response Centre (ERC)

The "EIA Resource and Response Centre" (ERC) which has been set up as a joint initiative of the "Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment" (LIFE), "the Environics Trust" and the "PEACE Institute Charitable Trust".



The Centre is in response to a felt need to provide third party assistance to government agencies like the Expert Appraisal Committee (For Environmental issues) and Forest Advisory Committee (for Forest issues), to keep a watch and to challenge, as per the need, EIA reports which may be based on inadequate and improper assessment of the impact of the proposed developmental activities on natural India including wild flora and fauna, rivers and other wetlands etc. Our aim will be to create a national level database on EIA reports as well as other related documents so that groups, individuals across the country could access the same. We intend to make the same available electronically too. This will enable groups and interested parties to compare EIA reports and to also ensure compliance with the approval conditions.

We plan to undertake the following activities as an ongoing effort to build the ERC:

- Create a panel of experts to critique EIAs report in terms of accepted standards which could be used at the time of Public hearings, presentations made to the Expert Appraisal Committee / Forest Advisory Committee / National Coastal Zone Management Authorities/ National and State Board for Wildlife and other such bodies of MOEF and other agencies who grant approval to such projects.
- ERC would also be open to providing expert assistance to various government bodies like EAC, FAC and NCZMA etc in assessing the EIA reports submitted to them by various project proponents.
- Conduct alternative Environmental Impact Assessment for certain proposed projects in order to ground truth and to highlight the shortcomings if any, of the existing studies carried out by the project proponents.
- To provide strategic support to NGO's and communities to challenge faulty EIA's before appropriate forums where project proposals are presumably based on inadequate assessments, lack of public consultation or lack of participation and information provided if any to the affected communities.
- It is our endeavor that through a focused and dedicated effort we will be able to act as an expert third party advocacy and action group which is in a position to scientifically critique and challenge faulty approvals granted to many projects. These range from mining, hydro and thermal power to roads, highways and ports among others which today threaten our forests, rivers, coasts, mountains and the communities which depend on these vital natural heritage.

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