

H. P. FOREST DEPARTMENT

REVISED POLICY

ON

DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-TOURISM

IN

HIMACHAL PRADESH

2005

1. PREAMBLE

Himachal is bestowed with unique features in its climate, its rich natural and man-made heritage and above all, the warm and peace loving people. This is what projects Himachal as one of the top five tourist destinations in the country, both for domestic as well as international visitors. As per estimates, roughly around 60 lakh tourists visit the State every year, as much as its actual population. However much of the tourism related activities are concentrated in the four major hill stations of Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala and Dalhousie. Due to this lop-sided growth pattern, the bulk of the tourist does not get an opportunity to visit the 'country side' leave alone our forests and sanctuaries which are indeed a paradise for the discerning lot.

Himachal Pradesh has legally classified forest area of 37,033 Sq. Kms., which is 66% of the total geographical area. Out of the area designated as forests, 12% area is under Protected Area Network. The per capita availability of forests in Himachal is 0.22 hectares, against the national average of 0.06 hectares. According to the reports of the Forest Survey of India, Himachal Pradesh during the last few years has registered an increase of 1859 Sq. Kms. in the forest cover. This increase is about 9% of the culturable forest area of the State. A small State like Himachal, which has only 1.7% of the geographical area of the country, has contributed a remarkable 4.5% of the net increase in the forest cover of the country. In addition the State has 32 wildlife sanctuaries and two National Parks. The State is a treasure house, both for plants as well as wild life. It is also home to some of the rare and endangered species like Snow Leopard, Musk, Deer, Himalayan Brown Bear and among pheasants, the Western-horned Tragopan which has been bred in captivity for the first time in the world in H.P.

The Revised Eco-Tourism Policy aims to bring the wilderness of Himachal closer to the tourist visiting the State and at the same time attempts to put in place adequate safeguards and systems leading to the preservation of these natural resources. By involving the local communities, the policy would help improve their prosperity through increased livelihood opportunities. It would also ensure adequate economic returns to the State which would be ploughed back into the environmental system for its proper up keep and maintenance.

2. VISION

The vision is to preserve and protect the natural heritage, both flora and fauna, of Himachal Pradesh and attract discerning tourists and visitors to the State; and in the bargain provide opportunities to enhance livelihood of the local people and alongside generate revenue for the sustainable development of its resources through the creation of a special purpose vehicle (SPV). The Eco-Tourism Policy would encourage a partnership between the SPV on the one hand and the civil society (local communities, NGOs, academic institutions and private enterprises/businesses) and the State (Forest, Tourism and Fisheries Department) on the other.

3. MISSION STATEMENT

To make Himachal Pradesh a leading Eco-tourism Destination in the Country by 2010.

4. OBJECTIVES

To achieve the above mission, the Policy seeks to pursue the following objectives:

- i) Create appreciation, education and awareness of natural heritage of Himachal Pradesh. The State will emerge as a resource center and a leading destination with reference to eco-tourism for the entire country and the Greater Himalayan Region.
- ii) Enunciate mechanisms for partnerships in eco-tourism both with the local communities as well as private enterprise committed to the goals of eco-tourism.
- iii) Identify and promote activities in tandem with the principles of community-based eco-tourism with the benefits accruing to the local community in terms of income as well as employment generation.
- iv) Ensure safeguards from environment point of view to effectively regulate the ecotourism activities in forest area.
- v) To generate resource through the Special Purpose Vehicle from the assets made available to it by the Forest Deptt. which would be used to create and maintain the assets.
- vi) To create a cadre of personnel within and outside the Forest Deptt. who are sensitive to the tenets of eco-tourism and can act as resource persons to further its cause.
- vii) To actively coordinate with the Tourism, Fisheries, Handicrafts, Culture, YSS, HMI (Himalayan Mountaineering Institute) and other related Deptts. to further the cause of eco- tourism.
- viii) To actively promote the concept of homesteads in rural areas connected with eco-tourism so that the income accrues to the local people.
- ix) To implement CBET (Community Based Eco-Tourism) concepts with the involvement of local communities, voluntary organizations, staff of the HPFD and other departments.

- x) To undertake sustainable public-private partnerships with regard to Government properties in the field of eco-tourism with the permission of the Govt. of HP and to raise funds there under.
- xi) To decongest the over-loaded tourist places so that the benefits of tourism are spread to rural areas. It will work in tandem with the Rural Tourism Scheme of the Department of Tourism.

5. STRATEGY

The above objectives would be achieved through the following:

A. Creating a Special Purpose Vehicle for anchoring the Eco Tourism activities:

1. The Forest Deptt will create a ***Special Purpose Vehicle*** in the form of a Society registered under the Registration of Societies Act 1860 for delivering the objectives of the Policy.
2. This SPV will cover the entire State. All existing Societies will either be merged with this Society or will work under or in tandem with this apex body to be chaired by the Chief Minister of the State.
3. It will work closely with the Forest Deptt both at the State as well as the local level. In fact its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as well as the other officials will be from the Forest Deptt. holding additional charge as ordered by the Govt. so as to effect economy as well as effective coordination.
4. At the project / site level, if need be, local Committees would be formed under the over all control of the SPV with adequate devolution of financial as well as administrative powers commensurate with the work at hand including having separate bank account .
5. It will concentrate its activities within the forest land, existing Wild Life Sanctuaries and Parks. The lessons learned from [GNHP](#) and the [Potters Hill](#) would be main-streamed into the functioning of the system.

B. Creating awareness and capacity building of the principal actors:

1. The State will develop as a resource center and a learning destination for eco-tourism not only for the country but for the entire Greater Himalayan Region.
2. The SPV to be created, in the initial years will concentrate on capacity building through experience sharing, workshops, field visits etc. It will be in touch with the leading organizations in this field and will organize at-least one national/international level seminar each year on the subject.
3. For capacity building, the SPV will coordinate with the Government for fund requirement to be made available through the Externally Aided Projects, the CAT plan funds in the Forest Deptt. and capacity building programmes of Tourism Development Board.
4. A percentage of the CAT Plan funds would be earmarked for ECO-TOURISM purposes.
5. The government would encourage people's participation in eco-tourism through Panchayati Raj Institutions, local bodies, co-operatives, non-governmental

- organizations and enterprising local youth & Mahila Mandals to create public awareness and to achieve a wider spread of tourist facilities.
6. Improved access is to be provided to markets, credit and training through interaction with Tourism Development Board, Western Himalayan Mountaineering Institute Manali, Hotel Management Institute Kufri and such other organizations.
 7. Development of appropriate training modules (continuous, practical & participatory) and training material/case studies for the various stakeholders and to ensure emergence of appropriate technologies is to be advanced.
 8. Ensure conducting periodic impact assessment studies ,whether positive or negative with regard to each project covering -
 - **Environmental i.e.** tourist number and carrying capacity
 - **Economic i.e.** seasonal employment opportunities for porters, employment of women etc.
 - **socio-cultural i.e.** decline in local support for local traditions and institutions, changes in traditional architecture, adverse impact on women etc.

C. Coordination with partner departments in the Govt.:

The government will aim to achieve necessary linkages and synergies in the policies and programmes of all concerned departments/agencies by establishing effective coordination mechanisms at the State and the District levels. Linkages with other policies/programs of the State Government will be established, especially with the New Revised Forest Policy, the New Tourism Policy of the State and active involvement of the various other departments i.e. Rural Development, Department of Fisheries, Town & Country Planning (SADA), Youth Services and Sports, Culture Handicrafts and Handloom etc.

D. CBET the corner stone of the Policy:

1. The concept of Community Based Eco-Tourism would be at the heart of the Policy.
2. The endeavor would be to extend maximum benefit to the local community either in the form of employment or income generation. All things being equal, priority would be given to the local communities which may come forward to take up activities---economic or promotional.
3. The local communities could be in the form of PRIs, CBOs, User Groups, Mahila Mandal, Yuvak Mandals, Forest Development Committees, Watershed-Development Committees etc.
4. Even where site is leased out to private parties under Public Private Partnerships, part of the income (at least 10%) would accrue to the local Panchayat / CBO.
5. Members of the local community will be represented in the committee/ society of the project/ site.
6. Incentives, market mechanisms and business support will be provided to the CBET Project by the SPV to be created.

E. Identification of Projects and sites:

1. The Forest Deptt. will identify sites for eco-tourism and hand them over for management to the SPV(The ownership would continue with the Forest Deptt.).
2. The existing projects and sites being managed by various societies constituted till date, will also hence forth function under the directions and guidelines issued by the apex body i.e. the SPV created for the purpose.
3. Specific areas within the State that are endowed with unique qualities will be promoted as 'Hot Spots' for eco-tourism. These may also include the remote cold-arid deserts of Pooh, Lahaul & Spiti with its unique culture; areas in Kullu for nature and out door activities with GHNP as the focal point, Tirthan for angling; Pong Dam for bird watching and water sports; and Shimla for trekking and nature trails etc.
4. The criteria for selection of project site would be its nearness to the tourist destination (which is essential for effective marketing), its viability as an economic proposition, its potential to attract discerning tourists and above all an enthusiastic local community willing to preserve its nature as well as man made heritage.

F. Public Private Partnership:

1. A constructive and mutually beneficial partnership between the public and the private sector would be worked out, with the sole purpose of development of the local area, income generation for the village folks and generation of resources and funds for the effective creation and maintenance of assets so essential for the development of eco-tourism.
2. All private parties or NGOs desirous of taking such properties on lease would have to be sensitive / sensitized in eco-tourism practices. Preference would be given to parties with proven track record in working in the field of eco-tourism.
3. The private entrepreneur would not be permitted to operate within the National Parks/Wildlife Sanctuaries.
4. In addition, a system of 'Reverse Tendering' would be adopted under which the proposals will be invited from the NGOs and private parties committed to the principles of eco-tourism for projects. These projects would be self proposed with a proper project format which would be reverse tendered with the first right of refusal with the originator of the proposal.
5. The project will not be leased out purely on commercial considerations. The compliance of eco-tourism principles would be a guiding principle for allotment of any project.
6. The private enterprise may be allowed to operate through the SPV subject to the following conditions:-
 - The company / NGO should have sufficient knowledge and if possible experience in working on an eco tourism project.
 - All projects identified for tie-up of this nature will be granted only through an open bidding process. No projects including self identified

ones will be given without open competitive bidding process. In all such cases the reverse tendering system will be followed.

- The Forest Deptt. /SPV has the right to reject any self proposed forests' project without assigning any reason.
- Stringent guidelines would be laid down by the Forest Deptt. with regard to the dos and don'ts for each project before offering it for competitive bidding.
- In the first instance, the project would be allotted for only 3 years subject to annual assessment of the compliance of the conditions imposed by the Forest Deptt.
- No permanent structure will be allowed to be erected under any circumstance by the private entrepreneur. Each and every temporary structure will have to be approved by the Eco-Tourism Society.
- Accommodations of all types shall only be in the form of tents or dismantable prefab material.
- Only on successful and satisfactory completion of project for the initial 3 years, will the project be extended, in which case it will be for a maximum for another 10 years (for 5 years at one time) subject to an increase of at least 15 % of lease amount after the initial three and the next five years. Renewal without bids will only be in exceptional cases and that too with the clear recommendation of the CEO in charge of the Eco Tourism Society.
- Normally at the end of the management lease of three years, the project will be re-tendered.
- A security deposit of Rs 1 lakh per hectare will be taken in each case. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions will result in forfeiture in full or in part of the above amount.
- Successful bidder will be issued the Letter of Intent which would be valid for three months from the date of issuance. This Letter of Intent issued to the entrepreneur would entitle the entrepreneur to enter the identified location and make detailed project report (DPR) to be submitted to the HPFD/ SPV in accordance with Deptts. guidelines. The project report submitted by the entrepreneur would then be examined within a time frame of three months and a final decision taken on the basis of which the IA would be signed/affidavit taken. In the first instance the lease would not exceed 3 years.
- The entrepreneur while submitting the Detailed Purpose Report (DPR) must include detailed description of all temporary work he would undertake, mentioning the arrangements to be made for disposing of solid and liquid waste, detail the trails/treks he would put to use for hiking, trekking, walking etc. A site development plan and a clear essential action plan for conservation and management of the allotted forest area would also be a part of the DPR.
- Due weight-age would be given to such projects where there is substantial use of locally produced products, including food stuffs; where percentage of job opportunities to the locals is high; where use

and promotion of non-conventional energy is incorporated; where measures have been taken to ensure ecological balance and where carrying capacity and sustainability is maintained. Concerted efforts need to be taken to reduce fuel-wood consumption through alternative energy sources; reduce the levels of garbage; reduce grazing impacts; strengthen community based institutions to plan and continue conservation activities; increased participation of locals in tourism related activities (porters, pack animal operators) and adopting participatory models of consultation and decision making process are there.

G. *Proposed activities:*

1. An inventory of existing and potential locations for nature-based tourism will be drawn-up by the special purpose vehicle (SPV) with information of facilities for tourists, and recreational activities and resources in rural areas etc.
2. Packages would be developed which involve nature trails, sightseeing adventures, bio-diversity tours, glaciers tours, angling, camping tours, cultural tours, horticulture (apple) tourism, village tourism, helicopter tours and others i.e. rafting, rock climbing, skiing etc. The services to be looked into would include boarding & lodging, guides, promotion of night halts & prices—that would go with service quality and environmental conservation.
3. Highlight trekking/nature walks through designated paths/eco-treks-- there are various excellent eco-treks and trails in H.P like the 'Churdhar Eco-trail', 'Dhauladhar Eco-trail'. Many bridle/inspection paths to some of the most picturesque areas in the State already exist and with little expenditure can be made ideal for eco-tourism. The other activities could be overnight camping in designated camps and forest rest houses, bird watching (ornithology) and study of flora and fauna (especiallyview ing of nocturnal wildlife) angling/fishing, nature camps etc.
4. Forest Rest Houses & Forest Inspection huts--The State Forest Department alone manages more than 400 forest bungalows located at vantage-points across the length and breadth of the State. It also manages 5000 kilometers long network of bridle paths and inspection trails, criss-crossing through the most beautiful forests of the State. This gives visitors myriad opportunities to trek across mountain passes, explore remote temples, to reach crystal clear lakes and traditional villages. These facilities beckon the young and the old alike to come and enjoy the best of Himachal Pradesh in its entire splendor. To begin with, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would be signed between the Forest Deptt and the special purpose vehicle (SPV) for transfer of management of some of the Forest Rest Houses on mutually agreed basis. Forest Officers on tour will continue to stay in these rest houses on the present rates, terms and conditions.

5. Interpretation & information centers with the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD) could also be handled by Non-governmental Organizations (NGO s) or other professional parties.
6. Concept of Homesteads could be promoted. Host families having reasonable traditional accommodation in the villages, en-route to good eco-treks can accommodate tourists on paying guest basis.
7. Community involvement to provide services would be promoted i.e. guides, porters, forest rest houses (FRH) attendants, cooks, park wardens, hosts for paying guests etc.
8. Extension and Publicity conducting by the SPV.

H. *Involvement of NGOs and CBOs*

1. The NGOs with good track record and reputation will be encouraged to participate in the programme especially for capacity building, promotion and evaluations.
2. Community based organizations will be actually encouraged to take part in the activities.

I. *Safety measures:*

1. The entry of the number of tourists permissible shall be kept within limits. The carrying capacity concept will be the cornerstone of the State's Eco-Tourism Policy.
2. Clear definitions of 'off limit activities', and 'off limit areas' (no private enterprise to be allowed in Sanctuaries/National Parks) will be strictly enforced. The onus shall always remain with the operator to abide by the laws of the State and the Union Government.
3. Where private sector is involved there must be collective responsibility for laying down industry standards, ethics and fair play.
4. Eco-tourism would aim to have low impact on environment and further minimal infrastructure requirements. The DPR/management plans would establish standards for development, refurbishing of the infrastructure, waste disposal, and treatment of sewage, control of litter and optimum use of the fragile eco-system accordingly.
5. Introduce regulatory measures to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability as well as safety and security of tourists.
6. There would be conscious effect towards sustainable human development, including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environmental regeneration and advancement of women and other disadvantaged marginal groups in the State.
7. Greater demand would be created for local products and new employment opportunities for the local community. Negative effects of traditional tourism on the ecology and social fabric must be reduced and the cultural integrity of the local people would be furthered.
8. Casual tourists shall be discouraged. It is necessary that tourists desirous of entering forests and wilderness areas should have an interest in the flora and fauna.

9. Addressing ecological and environmental concerns would form an important component of the Tourism Master Plans for popular destinations.
10. Revenues generated would be ploughed back for the maintenance and preservation of the environment.
11. The Deptt. would constantly evaluate the project and if it is found that community based ecotourism (CBET)/eco-tourism norms and concepts are not being followed, the project will be terminated forthwith.