

Government of Himachal Pradesh,  
Department of Forests,  
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NOTIFICATION

No. FFE-B-C(15)-1/2024

Dated : Shimla-2 the 29.10.2024

The Governor, Himachal Pradesh is pleased to notify 'Amendments in Revised Eco-tourism Policy-2017' as 'ECO-TOURISM POLICY 2024' enclosed as Annexure-I (23-pages) approved by the State Cabinet vide Memorandum Item No.24 on dated 22.10.2024.

By order.

(Kamlesh Kumar Pant)  
Addl. Chief Secretary (Forests) to the  
Government of Himachal

Endst. No. As above

Dated Shimla-2 the 29.10.2024

Copy forwarded to:

1. The Pr. Pvt. Secretary to the Hon'ble Chief Minister H.P.
2. The Sr. Pvt. Secretary to the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of H.P.
3. All the Administrative Secretaries Govt. of Himachal Pradesh.
- ✓ 4. The Pr. Chief Conservator of Forests(HoFF)/ PCCF(WL) H.P.
5. The Managing Director, HPSFDC, Shimla-9.
6. The Pr. Accountant General, H.P.Shimla-4.
7. The Sr. Dy. Accountant General, H.P.Shimla-4.
8. All the Dy. Commissioners, H.P.
9. All APCCF, CCF/CFs/DFOs (Territorial & Wildlife) in Himachal Pradesh.
10. The Joint Secretary (GAD) to the Govt. of H.P. w.r.t. the Cabinet item No. 24 dated 22.10.2024.
11. The Controller, Printing and Stationary Department, H.P. Shimla-171005 with the request to publish the Notification in Extra Ordinary Gazette.

DFO (E.T)

SPCCF (E.P.)

PCCF (HOFF)  
30/10/2024



*(Signature)*  
29/10/2024

(P.K.Taak)

Joint Secretary (Forests) to the  
Government of Himachal Pradesh



**ECO-TOURISM POLICY, 2024**  
**Of**  
**HIMACHAL PRADESH**  
**HIMACHAL PRADESH FOREST DEPARTMENT**

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## 1. PREAMBLE

Himachal Pradesh, known for its rich natural heritage, is amongst the top tourist destinations in the country, both for national as well as international visitors. Recent estimates, place the number at about 160 lakh visitors –more than twice the State's population. However, much of the tourism related activity is concentrated in four major locations, Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala and Dalhousie. A majority of the visitors do not get an opportunity to experience the rich bio-cultural diversity contained in the many Forest areas, Sanctuaries and National Parks that comprise such a large part of Himachal Pradesh.

The Forest Department of Himachal Pradesh framed an Eco-tourism policy during 2005 to enable tourist to experience this national heritage. The policy needed revision mainly due to the procedural requirements of obtaining clearance of Eco-tourism sites under Forest Conservation Act, 1980 as per guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India. Some changes in the existing policy document have also been necessitated in the context of the evolving understanding of Eco-Tourism concepts and principles.

The Forest Department of Himachal Pradesh framed an Eco-tourism Policy in 2001 which was revised in 2005, 2016 and in 2017 to promote Eco-tourism in the State. Now, Eco-tourism Policy 2017 requires some amendments to promote Eco-tourism activities in the State and in consonance with procedural requirements as per the MoEF&CC (*Van Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan Adhiniyam*), 2023 which is an amendment to the erstwhile Forest Conservation Act, 1980 as well as the Ministry's guidelines on Sustainable Eco-Tourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas issued in 2021.

The Revised Eco-Tourism Policy 2024 aims at bringing the wilderness and virgin ecosystems of Himachal Pradesh closer to visitors and at the same time ensure adequate safeguards and systems for the protection and conservation of these natural resources. By involving local communities, the policy would help in increased livelihood opportunities as well as their involvement in awareness building, protection and conservation. It also envisages generation of financial returns which can be ploughed back into proper up keep and maintenance of the



environment. It shall also promote greater understanding and appreciation for natural and cultural heritage.

## **CONCEPT**

'Eco-tourism', in a very broad sense, means venturing into and enjoying nature in such a way as to assure that negative impacts on the cultural and natural environment are minimized and mitigated. It is, therefore, 'responsible' tourism, which, besides being ecologically and culturally sensitive, helps the local communities in realizing social and economic benefits.

This Policy is based on the understanding that involvement of local communities in eco-tourism would support their livelihood needs and consequently create a stake for them in the conservation of local culture, ecology, and environment.

## **2.1 DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS RELATED TO ECOTOURISM:**

**2.1.1 Ecotourism activities:** Ecotourism activities are nature-based activities exclusively performed to sensitize people about the beauty, richness and fragility of the state's natural and cultural heritage, and shall not just focus on creating destinations in natural area or using natural environment for outdoor activities.

In line with the above-mentioned distinction, ecotourism activities in Himachal Pradesh will include one or more of the following:

- Activities like Trekking, nature walk, bird and wildlife watching, hiking, flora and fauna observation, photography, Boating MTB to view wildlife experience wilderness etc.
- Overnight Camping /Star Gazing in designated sites / forts / other monuments;
- Any travel focused on experiencing State's local culture including festivals, local folktales, history, historical monuments and heritage sites which promote eco-tourism and sustainability of local traditions;
- Lodging in campsites, eco-lodges and guesthouses that are located in an area of natural and/ or cultural beauty, and involves local specificities and
- Activities in specified areas of the forests such as guided nature trails, jungle safari in vehicles, etc.
- Stay away from the hustle-bustle of the cities in Forest Rest Houses to which Enjoy the calmness of nature.

**2.1.2 Sustainable Ecotourism Development:** Development of ecotourism in such a way that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generation without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations.

**2.1.3 Eco-tourism Assets:** Natural and cultural features that attract visitors, such as landscapes, endemic or rare flora and fauna, glamping/tenting sites, Forest Rest Houses/Inspection Huts/ Tree houses, ecotourism destinations etc.

**2.1.4 Eco-tourism Facilities:** accommodations, lodging facilities, and related amenities which blend with the natural and cultural environment of the area in terms of design, building materials, and energy, water and waste efficiency measures.

**2.1.5. Eco-tour Operators:** Tour operators specializing to cater eco-tours collaborating with local people focused on local nature and culture-based tourism, covering eco- circuits.

**1.1.6. Eco-tourism Product:** A combination of resources, facilities, activities and services which are sold and managed through qualified ecotourism operators including local communities or individuals.

**2.1.7. Eco-tourism Services:** basic services for ecotourism activities including but not limited to transportation, food, guiding, and interpretation. These services should cause minimum damage to the natural and cultural environment and promote a better understanding of the natural and cultural aspects of an area.

**2.1.8. Interpretation:** an educational activity to help visitors understand and appreciate the community resources. Interpretation includes facts, but also reveals the reason of the importance of those facts so that visitors are able to understand why the resources should matter to the individual visitors. Interpreter is a person who provides interpretation in natural and cultural areas, interpretation centre, parks etc.

### **3. VISION & OBJECTIVES**

The vision is to preserve and protect the natural (both flora and fauna) and cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh, provide opportunities to enhance livelihood of local people, generate resources for sustainable development and promote greater understanding and appreciation for this heritage through authentic Eco-Tourism initiatives.

The Eco-Tourism Policy would encourage a partnership between civil society (local communities, NGOs, Eco-Clubs, academic institutions) as well as private enterprises/businesses and the State Government Departments of Forest, Tourism, Fisheries, I&PH, Power & PWD.



#### 4. MISSION STATEMENT

To make Himachal Pradesh a leading Eco-tourism destination, with Eco-Tourism attracting at least 10% of overall tourists visiting the State by the year 2030.

#### 5. PRINCIPLES

Eco-Tourism can be one of the most viable options for conservation of natural resources and sustainable development in a mountain State like Himachal Pradesh. It has to be executed mindfully, with the minimum impact to inspire cultural awareness, tolerance, and commitment to natural resource conservation. The following Eco-Tourism principles will form the basis of this policy:

##### ***Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.***

- Design, develop and operate low-impact facilities.
- Focus on high ended tourists through High value, Low volume ecotourism.
- Provide a positive experience for both visitors and hosts.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Minimize physical, social and behavioural impacts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation and livelihood opportunities to local communities
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors
- Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the local People
- All ecotourism activities shall be in conformity with the applicable laws and regulations including but not limited to the provisions of the H.P. Eco-Tourism Policy; Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Guidelines on Eco-tourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas-2021; the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 and the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023 (as amended from time to time); the Guidelines and Clarifications, 2023 issued under Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 and the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023 (as amended from time to time) without any deviation, Environment Protection Act 1986; Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006, Tourism Policy of Himachal Pradesh.

#### 6. STRATEGY

The principles outlined above will be pursued through an appropriate strategy that comprises the following components:-

##### **A. Institutional Arrangements:**

- (i) Forest Department has created a ***Special Purpose Vehicle*** in the form of

'Himachal Pradesh Ecotourism Society' (HP ECOSOC), registered vide No.422 dated 30-06-2006 under the Registration rules of Societies Act 1860 to assist in delivering the mission and objectives of the Policy.

- (ii) HPECOSOC covers the entire State. It will work with eco-tourism Societies at Division/Circle level to facilitate PPP initiatives at identified locations and provide guidance in furtherance of the principles underlying this policy.
- The Division/Circle level societies shall be chaired by the concerned Conservator of Forests/Chief Conservator of Forests of the Forest Circle concerned. The Local Divisional Forest Officer (T)/DFO (Hqtr) will be the Member Secretary of the Division/Circle Level Society and a member of the Governing Body. The District Tourism Development Officer and representative of Deputy Commissioner as well as representatives from the Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti, Nagar and Gram Panchayats will be members of the Governing Body. New Circle Level Societies shall be constituted where these do not exist already and existing Division level Societies shall be merged into respective Circle level Societies in due course of time. The Division/Circle Level Societies can meet on quarterly basis to review, monitor and evaluate the implementation of various activities of all Eco-tourism projects in a Circle. The constitution is suggested as under:

(i)	Chairman	CF/CCF concerned
(ii)	Member Secretary	DFO(T)/DFO (HQ) of Circle
(iii)	Representative of Deputy Commissioner	Member
(iv)	Representative of Zilla- Parishad	Member
(v)	Representative of Gram Panchayats	Member
(vi)	Representative of BDC	Member
(vii)	Representative of Tourism Dept.	Member
(viii)	All DFOs of the Circle	Member
(ix)	DM Forest Corporation	Member
(x)	NGO/ CBO working in the field within the Circle	Member(one person)

This Governing body will be responsible for submitting the annual plan of operation(APO) to the HPECOSOC. The society will have Supervision Committees headed by the concerned DFOs who will be responsible for all the day to day operations and preparing the budget and annual plan etc. for approval of the Governing Body. The constitution of the Supervision Committee shall be as under:

1.	Divisional Forest Officer	Chief Executive Officer
2.	Divisional Manager of HPSFDC Ltd.	Member
3.	All R.Os of Concerned Division	Member
4.	Pradhan of the Gram Panchayat	Member
5.	SDO (I&PH)	Member

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 6. Representative of HIMURJA<br>(Solar Energy) | Member |
| 7. A.M. HPSFDC Ltd Concerned                   | Member |
| 8. NGO/CBO (One Member)                        | Member |

The Supervision Committees will look after projects and activities in the area of the Division.

- (iii) These Division/Circle level societies will send their proposals, duly approved in the respective Working plan of the concerned Division for fresh eco-tourism sites to HP ECOSOC for securing Government approval and further action for getting project proposals prepared and securing partners for their operation, by following the procedure laid down in this policy.

- (iv) **Centralized Coordination of Ecotourism Activities in Himachal Pradesh**  
**Ensure Synergy and Uniformity:** A mechanism for coordinated planning and execution of ecotourism activities shall be introduced. Specifically, all Annual Plan of Operations (APOs) of the Forest Circles, related to ecotourism, shall be submitted to Member Secretary HPECOSOC for approval of Head of the Department, thus ensuring synergy, consistency, and alignment with the State's broader ecotourism goals.

**B. Creating awareness and capacity building of the principal stakeholders:**

Ecotourism awareness and education are the fundamental pillars for fostering a culture of responsible ecotourism practices, environmental stewardship and cultural appreciation.

**Creating Awareness:**

HPECOSOC shall endeavour to implement suitable programmes and targeted initiatives to undertake the following strategic actions for ecotourism awareness at potential ecotourism sites by:

- i. Promoting environmental consciousness among tourists, local communities and stakeholders about the importance of environmental conservation, biodiversity and the need for responsible tourism practices.
- ii. Educate the tourists and locals about the diverse cultural, traditional heritage of the State and indigenous practices, fostering respect and preservation of cultural identities.
- iii. Encourage the tourists and stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices like waste reduction, water conservation and minimizing their ecological footprint. Promote the use of renewable and biodegradable resources and ecofriendly waste disposal methodologies.



- iv. Establish interactive tourist interpretation Centre within ecotourism zones offering information on flora and fauna, ecosystems, cultural heritage through exhibits, displays, AI techniques and multimedia presentations.
- v. Information dissemination through brochures, digital platforms at ecotourism sites to educate tourists about the ecological significance, biodiversity and conservation efforts within the region.
- vi. Organize guided tours, nature walks and interpretive trails led by trained guides to provide firsthand knowledge about nature and cultural aspects of Himachal Pradesh.

### **Capacity Building:**

- (i) HP ECOSOC will concentrate on capacity building through experience sharing, workshops, training programmes and field visits etc., either in-house or through carefully selected organizations /entities.
- (ii) To inculcate the spirit of environmental awareness at an early age, the Division level Societies would engage students at various levels beginning at the primary level.
- (iii) HP ECOSOC will develop appropriate training modules (continuous, practical & participatory) and training material/case studies for the various stakeholders and ensure that emergence of appropriate technologies is to be advanced.
- (iv) Certified Training programmes for nature guides, appreciation of flora/ fauna shall be organized. It shall be the endeavour of the Division level Societies to train a pool of certified nature guides and provide them livelihood opportunities.
- (v) Division/Circle level Societies shall liaise with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) working in the field of Natural Resource Management for providing them training and other material relevant for eco-tourism.
- (vi) For their education and awareness activities, HP ECOSOC and Division level Societies shall leverage funds through the Externally Aided Projects, the CAT Plans, Capacity Building programmes of H.P. State Tourism Development Board and resources generated from projects developed under PPP mode.

### **C. Community Involvement**

In general, Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) is tourism that is managed by the community for the tourist destinations. One of the main objectives of ecotourism is to involve local people in ecotourism development and provide them livelihood opportunities. As per MoEF&CC guidelines on Sustainable Eco-Tourism in Forest and

Wildlife Areas 2021, community-based tourism will be promoted as a preferred form of eco-tourism. The community should be made a stakeholder in all feasible options. The HPECOSOC is obliged to implement support to village development, taking into account their traditional rights and cultural systems.

- (i) The endeavour would be to extend maximum benefit to the local community either in the form of employment or resource generation. Local communities will be encouraged to come forward to take up various economic or promotional activities in their areas for furthering the vision and objectives of this policy.
- (ii) Such local communities could be involved through formation of Eco Development Committees (EDCs) at Division Level in the form of PRIs, CBOs, User Groups, Mahila Mandal, Yuvak Mandals, Forest Development Committees, watershed development committees, Eco-Clubs, Self-help groups etc.
- (iii) Encourage the establishment of community-owned enterprises, such as outsourcing the services in Ecotourism facilities, outsourcing the tenting sites to local bodies, handicrafts, and local guides, fostering economic empowerment. Support the creation of community-based tourism products, allowing local communities to actively participate in and benefit from ecotourism initiatives.
- (iv) Encourage the establishment of community owned enterprises, such as handicrafts, providing services in Forest Rest Houses, local guides, allowing local communities to actively participate in and benefit from ecotourism initiatives.
- (v) Members of the local community will be represented in the Division/Circle level societies as well as in the Executive Body.
- (vi) To introduce flexible models for the maximum benefits to the local communities and ensure that such models align with the overarching goals of the ecotourism policy while addressing the unique contexts of different stake holders.

#### **D. Coordination with partner Departments**

- (i) Necessary linkages and synergies in the policies and programmes of all concerned departments/agencies will be aimed at by establishing effective coordination mechanisms at the State and the District levels.
- (ii) Linkages with other partner Departments shall be established in the HP ECOSOC (at the level of Governing Body and Executive Committee) and other societies.
- (iii) ***Linkages with other policies/programs of the State Government/other States***

*& Eco-Tourism Societies of India will be established.*

- (iv) ***Collaboration between Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD), and Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department (HPTD):***

Collaboration between Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD), and Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department (HPTD) to set up ecotourism projects in Himachal Pradesh (HP) can be structured through several strategic steps. Expertise of both the departments can be utilized to set up an exemplary initiative in the State. For joint ventures, there is a need of assessment of potential ecotourism sites, considering factors like biodiversity, cultural significance and infrastructure needs.

To initiate such activities in forest areas with the assistance of HP Tourism Department, signing of an MoU between the Forest Department (through HPECOSOC) and HP Tourism department is mandatory.

### **E. Marketing**

Leverage marketing channels to promote ecotourism destinations, targeting eco-conscious travelers.

- a) **Branding of Ecotourism sites:** for promotion of Ecotourism destinations branding of potential ecotourism sites and Forest Rest Houses branding shall be created.
- b) **State and Destination Specific campaigns:** The HPECOSOC shall plan its own campaign to popularize the State as ecotourism and adventure tourism destination. The Circle Level Societies shall have to plan specific campaigns to showcase the unique offerings of the ecotourism sites and to promote ecotourism destinations.
- c) **Innovations and Digital Initiatives:** The marketing of ecotourism destination requires dissemination strategies and the aid of digital technology and other conventional means. The prime task of marketing and promotion of sites shall be done by the HP ECOSOC.
  - (i) HP ECOSOC shall provide a platform for effective marketing through website and website linkages, which shall provide information for online booking of facilities
  - (ii) HPECOSOC will encourage adoption of online ticketing/booking platforms.
  - (iii) Develop online platform for ecotourism operators to apply for licenses and certification.
  - (iv) Tie ups shall be facilitated with organizations/ entities/tour operators/ travel agents/hoteliers engaged in tourism promotion.
  - (v) Implement targeted digital campaigns to raise awareness about sustainable ecotourism practices and promote responsible tourism.
  - (vi) HP ECOSOC shall utilize the services of Publicity Wing of Forest Department for

- popularizing the eco-tourism destinations during fairs and festivals.
- (vii) The services of print and electronic media shall be utilized for dissemination of eco-tourism hot spots and potential sites so as to lure the 'discerning tourist'.
  - (viii) Forest Rest Houses included under eco-tourism, shall be used for marketing of eco-tourism products like camps/ nature walks/ trekking etc. by enhancing its infrastructure.
  - (ix) Foster collaboration with travel bloggers, influencers and digital content creators to amplify the reach and impact of ecotourism initiatives in the State.

#### **F. Important Stakeholders and their functions:**

- a) **Visitors:** Responsible travel to natural areas and making available financial contribution for conservation of natural heritage and empowerment of local people.
- b) **Local Communities:** Provide positive experiences for the visitors.
- c) **HP ECOSOC (Special Purpose Vehicle):** Practice and promote ecotourism according to the principles of ecotourism; Capacity building of stakeholders; key interface for PPP partners.
- d) **Division/Circle level Societies:** Managing all operations for responsible eco-tourism at ground level.
- e) **Government Departments (Forests, Tourism, PWD, I&PH, Rural Development, Revenue):** Provide positive experiences for the visitors; Minimize impact; Build environmental, cultural awareness and respect. **By implementing and educating others about ecotourism, contribute to the positive and more sustainable development of the tourism industry.**
- f) **Concerned Panchayat, BDC and Zilla Parishad:** Provide positive experiences for the visitors.
- g) **Partners managing sites:** Practice and promote ecotourism according to the principles of ecotourism.

#### **G. Development & Management of Eco-Tourism Assets**

- (i) **Identification of Potential Ecotourism Sites:** The forest Department will identify areas for eco-tourism in the forest and the Protected Areas, in pristine areas rich in biodiversity or of aesthetic significance. Ecotourism sites will be identified by assessing the potential of sites based on criteria including the site's

unique significance, resource availability, vulnerability, logistics etc. This assessment shall be the essential prerequisite for development of sites in the ecotourism chapters incorporated in the Working Plans of concerned Forest Divisions for Ecotourism activities in Himachal Pradesh. The site developed will cater to different target groups and will include camps, hiking, trekking, wildlife sighting, bird watching wildlife sighting trails, wellness centres, boating, photography, visit to medicinal plants conservation area, craft making, agricultural products, local handicraft, promoting festivals, interpretation centre visit etc.

- (ii) **Self -identified Sites by Stakeholders:** if stakeholders other than HP Forest Department identify a potential ecotourism site, the proposed site shall be assessed by the concerned DFO for undertaking the Ecotourism activity and shall be submitted to CEO HPECOSOC for further process.
- (iii) The Eco-tourism site shall be developed only in identified ecotourism zone and in eco-friendly manner. While developing support infrastructure for ecotourism it shall be ensured that the natural profile and ecological integrity of the ecotourism site including its biodiversity value is maintained. However, no permanent structure shall be made /constructed to create ecotourism facility/structure, but temporary structures/facility made predominantly of natural material of local origin may be allowed in Protected Area or on forest land as per the approved Working Plan/Management Plan/Working Scheme. Home stay managed by local communities on non-forest land shall be promoted.
- (iv) The State already boasts of a few Van Vihars and nature awareness centres. It shall be the endeavour to bring all the facets of such nature tourism related assets into a common fold under the aegis of HPECOSOC in this policy.
- (v) Development of nature parks/ van vihars, nature trails etc. that are important from eco-tourism point of view shall be carried out so that not only the tourists outside State have access to nature. State dwellers shall also have an opportunity for nature appreciation and recreation. ***The Division/Circle level Societies shall propose an APO for utilization and management of these assets which shall require prior approval of the HPECOSOC. The funds shall be utilized in accordance with the approved APO.***
- (vi) Eco-tourism circuits shall be created, which will allow the visitors to access the

- existing infrastructure of Forest Rest Houses/Eco-Tourism camping sites.
- (vii) HP ECOSOC shall facilitate selection of partners for Eco- Tourism sites in PPP mode after taking approval of Government of HP. The guidelines about the management of existing Eco-Tourism sites shall be in accordance with this policy document. Adherence to guidelines will be overseen by the Division/Circle level societies.
- (viii) Trekking routes shall be popularized and arrangements shall be worked out to offer trekking packages to the discerning tourist, who may like to visit rural and interior areas of the State. The HPECOSOC shall prepare a comprehensive list of all the trekking routes, identified for ET activities, and work out modalities for Design, Development And Maintenance (DDM)of the same in consultation with Tourism, Police and other line departments.
- (ix) Eco-Tourism societies at division level shall endeavor to tie up with school groups and colleges for organizing camps in selected Forest Rest Houses /Eco-Tourism Camping sites operating under its aegis.
- (x) Eco Circuits shall be created by these societies to link the potential sites.
- (xi) Considering that the local livelihood improvement is one of the expected outcomes of eco-tourism homestay based hospitality enterprises will be encouraged.
- (xii) Assessment of Carrying Capacity: Carrying capacities of visitors and vehicles, those may be allowed to enter inside the identified area, will be assessed and ceiling on number of visitors/vehicles of those may be allowed to enter the area at any given time, will be fixed. Carrying capacity assessment will cover:
- Number of Persons visiting the PA at different points of time
  - Number of Vehicles/boats, etc. entering the PA
  - Infrastructure
  - Duration of the visits
  - Duration of exposure of the PA to [co-tourism activities]

#### **H. Development and Management of New Eco-Tourism Sites through Departmental Mode and Public Private Partnership (PPP) /Operators**

A constructive and mutually beneficial partnership between the public and the private sector would be worked out for development of New Eco-Tourism Projects by selection of Operators for potential ecotourism sites in Himachal Pradesh and projects will be developed as per MoEF&CC Guidelines for sustainable Ecotourism in Forest and

wildlife areas- 2021 as well as *Van Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan Adhiniyam* Amended Rules 2023. Some sites shall be developed by the H.P. Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) and the HP State Forest Development Corporation Ltd (HPSFDC) which are agencies of the State Government. HPTDC will be given preference over HPSFDC if they ask for the same site. They will, however, be given only those sites which they want to run on their own. Few sites shall be developed in departmental mode. PPP projects will only be given directly by the HPECOSOC under the aegis of HP Forest Department. Circle Level Societies may therefore take action accordingly

**(i) Type of Structures allowed:**

No permanent structures will be allowed. Only following types of structures will be allowed:

- a. Tents of various types;
- b. Wooden structures; and
- c. Pre-fabricated structures which can be removed.
- d. Or other eco-friendly structures

In all these cases, flooring of cement or tiles or stone may be put up without building deep foundation.

**(ii) Modes of Operation:**

The sites may be operated in the following modes:

- a. By the societies directly on departmental mode;
- b. By the H.P. Tourism Development Corporation/H.P. Forest Development Corporation and;
- c. Through a private party/outsourcing agency/PPP mode. These will be given directly by the HPECOSOC.
- d. By the Local Communities

Even in departmental mode some services may be outsourced or given in PPP mode. Detailed terms and conditions and model agreement will be developed for the sites.

**(iii) Investment/Building of infrastructure:**

Infrastructure i.e. paths, roads, sewerage, water supply and all buildings/structures may be developed in the following alternatives:-

- a) All infrastructures to be build by Societies/Tourism Corporation/ Forest Corporation;
- b) Partial infrastructure by Societies & partially out-sourced/private agencies;

- c) All infrastructures by out-sourcing to private agency/PPP mode/ through Operators.

Whoever builds the infrastructure, the ownership will lie with the Forest Department i.e. Government. The private party or Corporations, if allowed to build infrastructure, will be on behalf of Forest Department and assets created will therefore be owned by Forest Department only.

The private party will build infrastructure only in land allotted. In case any work pertaining to water supply or sewerage has to be done outside the allotted area, Forest Department may be asked to do the work on payment basis or society may do it. If any infrastructure belonging to Forest Department of Government falls in the area it may be allowed to be used if included in the project by the Forest Department.

**(iv) Nature/Forest Awareness Centres**

Those sites where all infrastructure belongs to Forest Department and is primarily used for creating of awareness about nature/forests, training regarding environmental protection/nature/forestry and spreading message to the community, generating interest in nature are considered as Forest sites and will also serve as Nature/Forest Awareness Centres. These centres will have experts on the subject and literature/audio visual aids and material etc. to create awareness about Nature/Forests and sensitize the visitors about Environmental Conservation.

**(v) Time period of allocation to private parties:**

- i. When all investment is made by Society(ies) of Forest Department: 3 years extendable by 2 years
- ii. Where major investment is made by the private party-out sourced agency: 10 years extendable by 5 years. The time period of allocation for Tourism/Forest Corporation will also be 10 years extendable by 5 years.

**(vi) Common facilities:**

In all the modes of operation, it shall be ensured that following common facilities are available to the visitors:-

- a. Booking arrangement ;
- b. Website ; and
- c. Publicity.

**(vii) Exemption of FCA clearance for Eco-Tourism Projects under Section 2 of amended Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:**

Recent amendments in Forest (Conservation) Act, 2023 vide amendments to Section 2 of the earlier Act provide that :-

“Explanation.- For the purpose of this section “non forest purpose” means the breaking up or clearing of any forest land or portion



thereof for –

(a) the cultivation of tea, coffee, spices, rubber, palms, oil-bearing plants, horticultural crops or medicinal plants.

(b) any purpose other than reforestation.

but does not include any work relating to or ancillary to conservation, development and management of forests and wildlife, such as—

- (i) silvicultural operations including regeneration operations;
- (ii) establishment of check-posts and infrastructure for the front line forest staff;
- (iii) establishment and maintenance of fire lines;
- (iv) wireless communications;
- (v) construction of fencing, boundary marks or pillars, bridges and culverts, check dams, waterholes, trenches and pipelines;
- (vi) establishment of zoo and safaris referred to in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, owned by the Government or any authority, in forest areas other than protected areas;
- (vii) eco-tourism facilities included in the Forest Working Plan or Wildlife Management Plan or Tiger Conservation Plan or Working Scheme of that area; and
- (viii) any other like purposes, which the Central Government may, by order, specify.”;

The exemption is subject to certain conditions and limitations imposed under Eco-Tourism guidelines issued by the MoEF&CC in 2021 which includes among other things that *“no permanent structure shall be made/ constructed to create ecotourism facility/structure, but temporary structure/facility made predominantly of natural material of local origin may be allowed in Protected Area or on forest land”*.

#### **(viii) Allotment of Projects**

Such projects shall be allotted to the private sector through a transparent and competitive process. The Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India for Formulation, Appraisal and Approval of Public Private Partnership Projects shall be broadly followed for greater transparency. The following stepwise procedure shall be followed.

#### **a) Step-I: Project Identification-Selection of new sites**

The concerned Divisional Forest Officer will initiate ecotourism planning by including Ecotourism Chapter in the approved Working Plan of the Division based on identification of eco-tourism sites, including carrying-capacity analysis, propose ecotourism activity, categorisation of infrastructure support that may be allowed, and training and capacity building needs of the partners.

- I. **Eco-tourism Plan or DPR:** An Eco-tourism Plan or DPR shall be prepared for every eco-tourism site by the Operators. The prepared Plan shall be approved by HPECOSOC for sites under various controls as follows:
- II. **For Sites within Forest/Protected Areas:** The Eco-tourism Plan for the areas falling inside the notified forest/protected areas shall form part of duly approved Working Plan/Management Plan/ Working Scheme.
- III. New Eco-Tourism Projects proposed to be taken up through PPPs may be identified through various channels of Forest Department and forwarded to the HP ECOSOC by Circle level societies. The forest land to be leased out for each project shall be maximum upto one (1) hectare and no felling of trees should be involved. HP ECOSOC will assess prima facie feasibility keeping in view relevant parameters of access, infrastructure, attractions, etc. and secure government approval to proceed further in the matter. This will involve engaging of consultants for project formulation, preparation of bidding documents and assisting in this process. The Himachal Pradesh Infrastructure Development Board (HPIDB) shall be asked to assist in this process as envisaged in the HP IDB Act and as per the instructions of the Finance Department issued from time to time.
- IV. **Allotment of more Than 1 Hectare of Forest Land for Ecotourism Activities in certain cases :**

This policy also aims to promote sustainable tourism by limiting the use of land for such activities to minimize environmental impact. However, certain ecotourism projects with significant environmental, economic, and social benefits may require more than 1 hectare to operate effectively. These include projects such as eco-huts, large-scale conservation tourism, and wildlife safaris, which may need additional space to maintain their ecological balance while providing a unique visitor experience.

In order to accommodate such projects, allotment of more than 1 hectare for ecotourism activities is permitted, on case to case basis.

Certain projects that require more land may include:

- **Eco-Huts and Retreats:** Some eco-huts with a focus on sustainability and conservation need larger areas for eco-friendly infrastructure, organic farming, or forest preservation.
- **Biodiversity Parks and Nature Parks:** Nature-based recreational areas may require more land to maintain low visitor density and ensure minimal disturbance to the natural environment.

- **Wildlife Conservation Projects:** Projects focused on wildlife conservation or safaris may need larger areas to ensure the protection of species and ecosystems, while allowing tourism activities in a responsible manner.

Each of these cases must be backed by a comprehensive justification, ensuring that the allotment aligns with the State policies and that any additional land use remains sustainable.

In such cases, the project proponents (both public and private) may apply for Forest land more than 1 hectare. The justification for the need for additional space must be submitted to the government, detailing the following:

- Carrying Capacity of the project as per MoEF& CC guild lines.
- The economic and social benefits to the local community.
- How the project supports conservation efforts and sustainable tourism practices.

The government, through the Himachal Pradesh Ecotourism Society (HPECOSOC) and other relevant authorities, will review the proposal, ensuring that any additional land is used responsibly and that the project contributes to the State's ecotourism objectives.

The allotment of Forest land above 1 ha. for the furtherance of Eco-tourism initiatives shall require the approval of the Cabinet on case to case basis.

#### **b) Step II: Approval of HPIDB to Final Project Proposal**

A model RFP has already been prepared in consultation with one of the agencies empaneled with the HPIDB. This model RFP may be used for design, development and maintenance of eco-tourism sites. However, in case, the department proposes to deviate from the model RFP, the department will approach HPIDB again.

#### **Step III: Approval and Allotment of Ecotourism Sites for Further Outsourcing and Maintenance by Operators**

In order to promote sustainable ecotourism, a comprehensive assessment of potential ecotourism sites has been conducted in the State and these potential sites are incorporated in the Master Plan as well as the ecotourism chapters in the respective approved Working Plans, Management Plans etc. The reserve price for these sites need to be assessed by a committee constituted by the Head of the Department. This Committee shall propose the ecotourism sites deemed suitable for outsourcing design, development and maintenance, along with recommendations for reserve prices that are reflective of the Unique Selling Propositions (USPs) and the ecotourism potential of each site. Once the approval

as such has been granted by the administration department, the outsourcing of design, development and maintenance process shall be initiated by the HPECOSOC. It is proposed that the remaining process of tendering, approval of tender and entering into agreement etc., of the ecotourism sites, shall be completed by the Executive Committee (EC) of HPECOSOC. It is pertinent to mention here that the Executive Committee (EC) is headed by the Secretary (Forest) with CCF (Eco Tourism) as the Member Secretary. The EC shall ensure a transparent and competitive process, in compliance with State regulations, and will finalize the allotment based on the highest annual concession fee proposal received from the operator, while also considering the letters capacity to sustainably develop the site.

Eligibility conditions for DDM operators will be as specified in the RFP as per criteria enclosed at Annexure-A.

**c) Step- V: Eco-restoration**

(i) Sites that shall be offered for Eco-Tourism projects shall be returned back by the entrepreneur after the project period as envisaged in the Concession Agreement is over. The entrepreneur shall pay eco-restoration charges as specified in the Concession agreements and any subsequent agreements mutually arrived at thereafter.

(ii) Eco-restoration refers to the scientific practice of ecological restoration, which is the practice of renewing and restoring degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems and habitants in environment by active human intervention and action.

(iii) The idea is to bring back the site to its original condition (or as near to original as possible), through interventions designed to (a) mitigate the impacts caused by humans on forest lands and (b) allow/ supplement process of natural rejuvenation. The structures put up will be transferred to Forest Department as such and will not be removed.

**d) Step- VI: Distribution of Revenues generated through Eco Tourism:**

(i) HP ECOSOC and Division/Circle Level Eco-Tourism Societies shall act as the repository of all possible sources of funding, like grants from State Tourism Department, Tourism Department of GoI, HP State CAMPA and other such sources.

(ii) HP ECOSOC and Division/Circle Level Eco-Tourism Societies shall generate

resources from (a) levy of user charges/concession fee on eco tourism sites in PPP mode, (b) fees from van vihars, camps, treks, trails, film shooting, rest houses etc.

(iii) Distribution of Revenue generated through Eco-tourism sites, Van Vihars, Van Chetna Kendra and Nature Awareness Centres and use of government assets such as rest houses shall be as under:

- a) **State Government Share:** 20% of the total revenue realized shall be deposited in the Government treasury.
- b) **HP ECOSOC Share:** 20% of the total revenue realized shall go to the HP ECOSOC
- c) **Division/Circle Level Eco-Tourism Society Share:** Remaining 60% revenue shall remain with the Division/Circle Level Eco-Tourism Society to implement the action plans and also for further sharing with the local Gram Panchayats/communities for which appropriate guidelines shall be framed.
- d) **HPSFDC Ltd/ HPTDC Share:** The HPSFDC Ltd. / HPTDC shall make use of 60% share for the Promotion of Eco-Tourism as well as a proportion out of this amount shall go as revenue to the Corporation. Appropriate guidelines will be framed for this purpose.
- e) **Impact assessment studies, research and 'do not disturb' practices:**
  - (i) Impact assessment studies would be carried out at periodic intervals so as to ascertain impacts of eco-tourism on environment and remedial measures taken.
  - (ii) Impact assessment studies would also be carried out to gauge the efforts being made for education and awareness about nature and ecology through eco-tourism.
  - (iii) 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. Carrying capacity shall be determined for various eco-tourism products i.e. sites, trekking sites/trekking circuits.
  - (iv) Eco-tourism would aim to have low impact on environment and minimal infrastructure requirements.
  - (v) Regulatory measures to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability as well as safety and security of tourists shall be enforced through appropriate instruments.
  - (vi) There would be conscious effect towards poverty alleviation, employment generation and environmental regeneration.
  - (vii) A set of 'do not disturb' guidelines would be issued for educating tourists, private

enterprises so as to inculcate the right eco-tourism spirit, to minimize the use of resources for recreation and for general protection of nature.

(viii) Research shall be undertaken in various facets of eco-tourism, with a view to encourage eco-tourism, minimize negative impacts, eco-restoration techniques and technologies and to offer better eco-tourism products including their marketing.

**J) Future Policy for Existing Sites - Impact Assessment Studies:**

Impact assessment studies to evaluate the on-going projects shall be carried out immediately. Based on that, fresh project formulation is proposed by following the same process as already specified for new sites. The only difference will be in selection of PPP partner. Swiss Challenge method will be used for allotment on the culmination of the term of the project. This will allow the existing partners (subject to their meeting eligibility conditions) to match a higher financial bid by any other person, subject to any minimum conditions of original bid amount specified in the RFP. The existing sites given for the term less than specified in this policy i.e. ten years extendable by five years may be brought under the amended policy through mutual agreement.

**K) Eco Club:**

An Eco Club has been created at the State level for promotion of Environment conservation related activities. Any individual interested in Environmental conservation and Nature may become member of the Club. The Club promotes Environment & Nature conservation in Himachal Pradesh. All the persons staying in any of the Eco-tourism sites will be encouraged to become members of the Club in order to continue their long term association with the Eco-tourism sites. It is hoped that the membership will increase gradually and will go in lakhs. There will be tremendous support for such environmental friendly activities in H.P. Eco Clubs will be registered as separate society with Chief Secretary as Chairman and the Hon'ble Chief Minister as Chief Patron.



**Minimum Eligibility Criteria**

To be eligible for pre-qualification and short-listing, a DDM Operator shall fulfil the following conditions of eligibility:

Sr. No.	Minimum Eligibility Criteria	Supporting Documents
1	<p>A DDM operator may be a natural person, sole proprietorship, partnership firm, limited liability partnership under the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 or a company (whether public or private) incorporated under the Companies Act 1956/2013 or any other legal entity duly registered and existing as per its applicable governing law(s).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Certificate of incorporation/ registration with the relevant Govt. authority;</li> <li>ii. Copies of Memorandum of Association and Article of Association in case of a company; or</li> <li>iii. Copy of the partnership deed in case of a partnership firm; or</li> <li>iv. Copy of LLP Agreement in case of a LLP; or</li> <li>v. Copy of the Trust Deed in case of a Trust; or</li> <li>vi. Copy of Byelaws in case of a Society.</li> <li>vii. Copy of the Board Resolution/ Partners Resolution/ Society Resolution/ Authority Letter for participation in the bidding process for the Project.</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Financial Capacity:</b> The DDM Operator shall have a minimum positive Net Worth of Rs. 3,00,00,000/- (Rupees Three Crores Only) at the close of the financial year preceding the Bid Due Date i.e. on March 31, 2024. However, in case the DDM Operator is a certified Bonafide Himachali, the minimum positive Net Worth requirement shall be Rs. 1,00,00,000/- (Rupees One Crore Only) at the close of the financial year preceding the Bid Due Date i.e. on March 31, 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Certificate(s) as per the format at Annexure 4, complete with supporting documents, from its statutory auditors/ chartered accountant specifying the Net Worth of the DDM Operator at the close of the financial year on March 31, 2024, and also specifying that the methodology adopted for calculating such Net Worth is in accordance with the methodology provided in Clause 3.2.2 below.</li> <li>ii. Copy of the Balance Sheet, Profit &amp; Loss Account/ Income Tax Return for the FY 2023-2024.</li> <li>iii. Where the DDM operator has considered the value of any immovable property as a part of the Assets owned by him/ her for the purpose of calculating Net Worth, then the DDM Operator shall be essentially required to provide copy/ies of registered sale deed and/ or valuation report(s) in support of the same. For further clarity, where the value of the property is shown at registry value then copy of the registered Sale Deed shall be enclosed and where the market value of the property has been shown then copy of the valuation</li> </ul>

		<p>report of a registered valuer depicting such value or proof of applicable circle rate (being equal to the value being claimed) be provided in support of value of the property being claimed.</p>
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3.2.1 *For the purposes of the RFP, methodology for calculating Net Worth shall be under:*

- (a) **in case of an Individual** :Assets (including cash) LESS All Liabilities.
- (b) **in case of a Sole Proprietor**: aggregate value of assets and deducting liabilities (Net Worth = Total Assets - Total Liabilities)
- (c) **in case of a Partnership firm/ LLP**: [Fixed Assets +Trade Receivables + Current Assets] - [Firms Loan +Current Liabilities]
- (d) **in case of a Company**: the aggregate value of the paid-up share capital and all reserves created out of the profits and securities premium account, after deducting the aggregate value of the accumulated losses, deferred expenditure and miscellaneous expenditure not written off, as per the audited balance sheet, but does not include reserves created out of revaluation of assets, write-back of depreciation and amalgamation.
- (e) **in case of a Trust or Society**: Capital/Corpus + Free Reserves.

