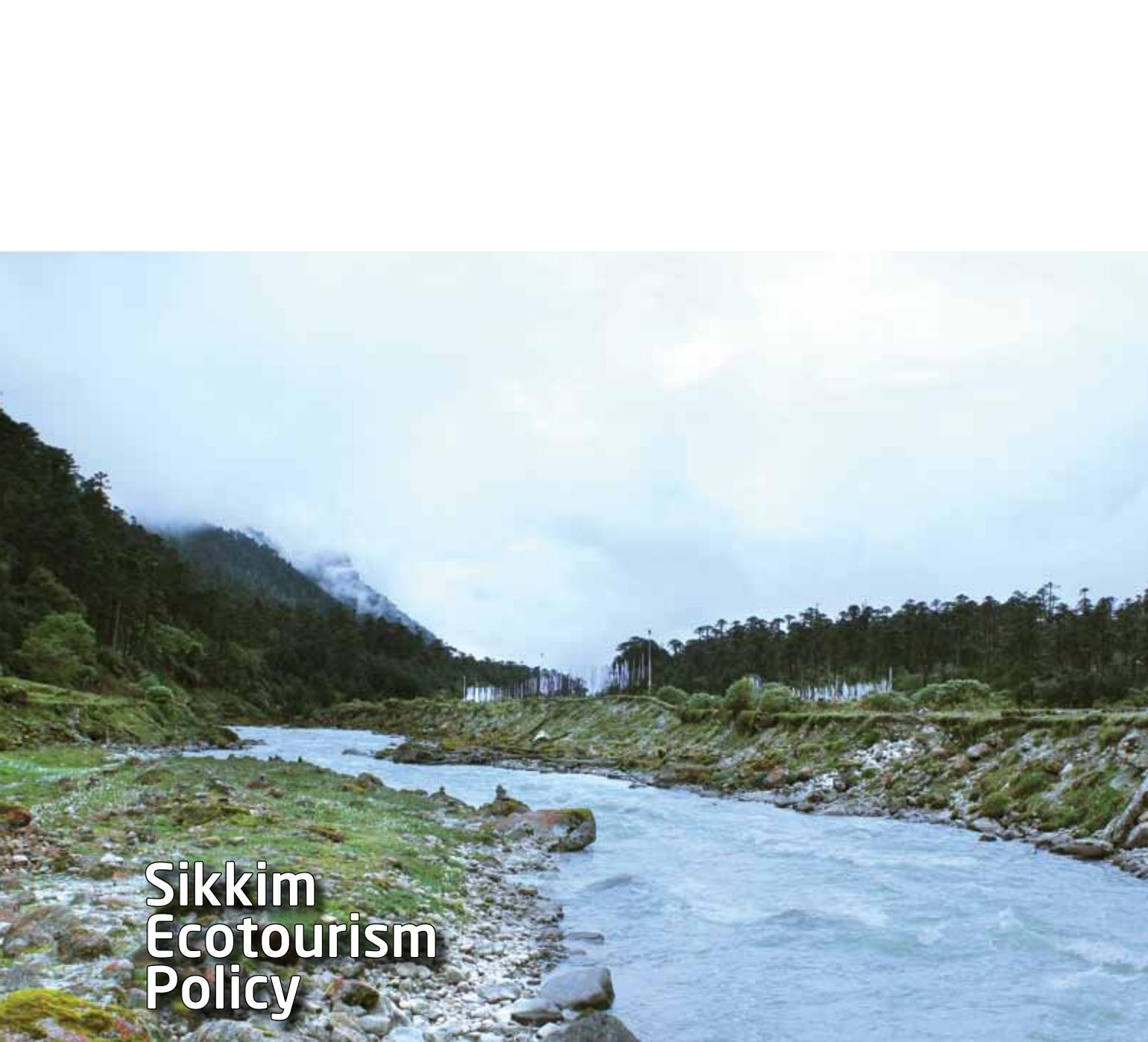


# Sikkim Ecotourism Policy

Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP)  
Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management  
Government of Sikkim





# Sikkim Ecotourism Policy

Published by : \_\_\_\_\_

Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP)  
Department Of Forest, Environment And Wildlife Management,  
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**Pawan Chamling**  
(Honoris Causa)  
Chief Minister of Sikkim



03592-202575 (O)  
03592-202304 (R)  
E-mail : cm-skm@hub.nic.in

Gangtok - 737103  
Sikkim

## MESSAGE

I am glad to know that Sikkim Ecotourism Policy is being released to provide for broad policy guidelines to all the stakeholders. Given the sensitive eco-system and the great responsibility on our shoulder to provide for environmental security to the entire Nation, we would require some concrete roadmap and operating guidelines to undertake ecotourism trade in Sikkim. This is to ensure smooth conduct of tourism as a major service sector industry in the State and at the same time protect and promote our abundant natural resources and unique cultural heritage.

The State Government recognized ecotourism as the most viable and non polluting economic instrument long time ago. Owing to our aggressive promotion of ecotourism, many stakeholders across the region and the country also embraced the same policy in their own region. As it stands today, the Service Sector contributes handsomely towards the GSDP ratio and provides huge avenues for self employment for our educated pool of human capital. This Policy, I believe, will maintain a healthy natural and social environment fostering self reliance among our people.

Let me congratulate all and everyone involved in bringing out this Policy document. In a matter like ecotourism, we must always enlist the spirited participation of all stakeholders and general public to remain collectively responsible towards maintaining the sanctity of our Mother Nature for all time to come.

With best wishes

(Pawan Chamling)



*Bhim Dhungel*  
MINISTER



Tourism & Civil Aviation/  
Forest Env. & W. L. Mng./  
Mines, Minerals & Geology  
and Science, Technology &  
Climate Change Department  
Government of Sikkim

## MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to be associated with the Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation & Forest Management Project (SBFP). This project has been initiated in the State of Sikkim to strengthen biodiversity conservation activities and forest management capacity and to improve livelihood for the local people who are dependent on forest. One of the major objectives is the preservation and protection of natural resources and environment to achieve sustainable development. It is also to develop understanding between people, to create employment opportunities and bring about socio-economic benefits to the community, particularly in the interior and remote areas and to strive towards balanced and sustainable development.

The rich natural biodiversity of Sikkim has necessitated the need for conservation of biodiversity and capacity development of FE&WLM department along with Socio-economic development in the state. As a result, with an aim to achieve necessary linkages of all concerned departments/ agencies by establishing effective co-ordination mechanisms, the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy has been brought out. The new Ecotourism Policy also aims to providing directions for a memorable and pleasant stay of the eco-tourists with reliable services.

To achieve the goals of ecotourism a cooperative network has been established under the Policy. The network includes the Sikkim Ecotourism Council with an executive arm, the Sikkim Ecotourism Directorate. It also incorporates various Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) working in tandem with Panchayats, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Tourism Development Committees (TDCs), Self Help Groups (SHGs) and other local peoples' representative groups and State Tourism & Civil Aviation department.

The Policy has been developed proactively by the State which desires not only for forest protection and management; but for sustainable livelihoods during the project implementation period and to continue the same afterwards as well.

  
(Bhim Dhungel)  
MINISTER



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# 1. Preamble



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The State of Sikkim, with rich abundance of flowering plants per unit area as compared with the other neighbouring states and countries such as Nepal and Bhutan, is located in the area of the Mega-Biodiversity hotspot of Eastern Himalayan Region. The State is embraced with the rich biodiversity of more than 4,500 species of flowering plants, more than 50 species of fish, 690 species of butterflies, 16 species

of amphibians, 78 species of reptiles, 550 species of birds, and 154 species of mammals. The State is also unique as a destination on the tourism canvas of the world. Nature is bountiful in gifting Sikkim with great landscapes, forests, streams, rivers, glaciers, lakes, snow capped mountains and cold deserts. All these beautiful gifts are wrapped in different flavours of indigenous social



practices, exotic cultures and rich traditions. Most of these natural treasures are located in the Protected Areas (PAs) under the Forests, Environment, and Wildlife Management Department (FEWMD), Government of Sikkim. It is of utmost necessity that we conserve this natural heritage and at the same time open our doors to welcome visitors from both domestic and foreign countries.

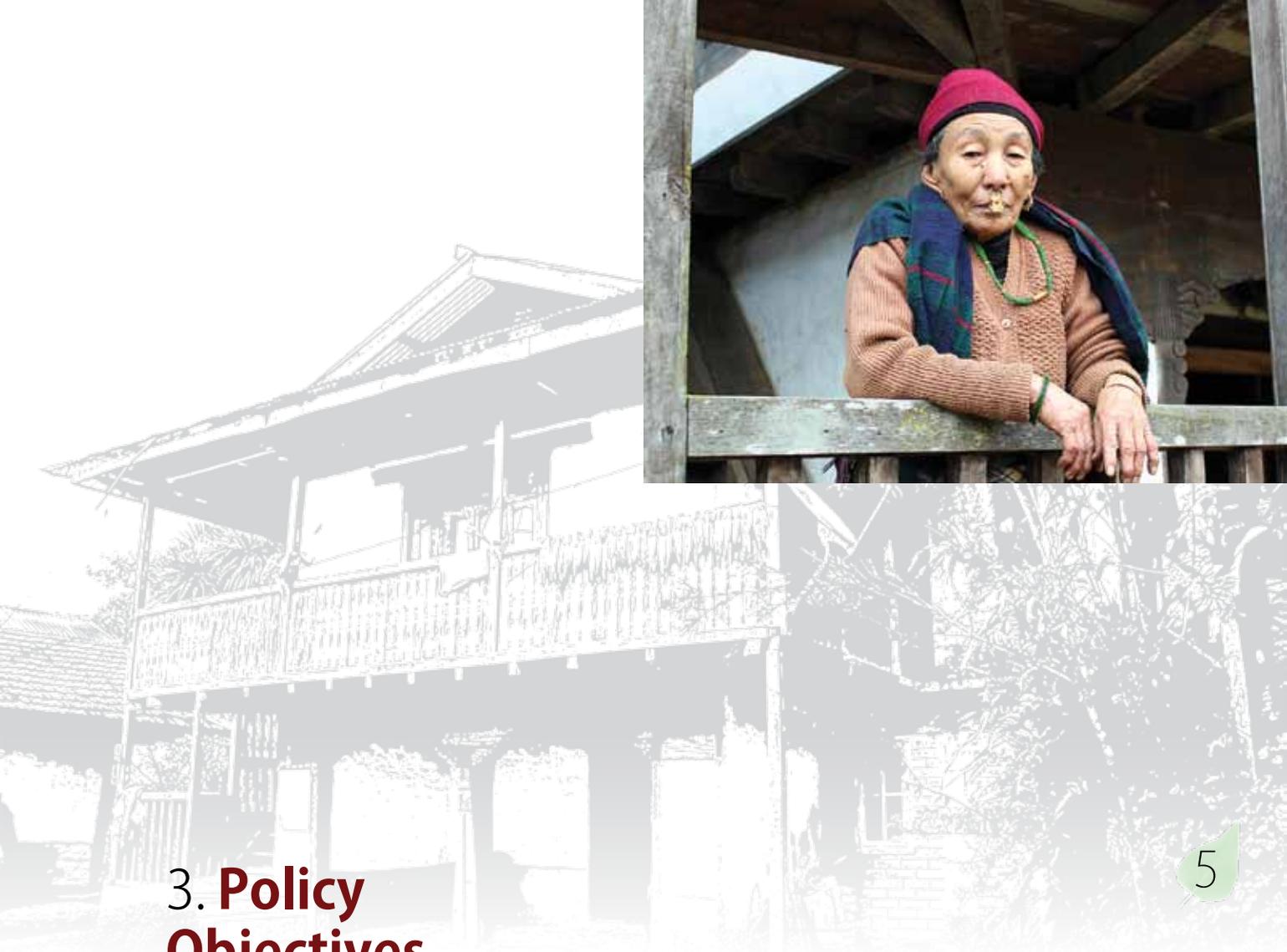
Since the Government of Sikkim addresses ecotourism as a priority sector, it is necessary to formulate an ecotourism policy that will act as a guiding principle in bringing about unique amalgamation of tourism and conservation. It also simultaneously shares the benefits of ecotourism on social, cultural, economic and physical environment and minimizes the negative impacts of ecotourism.



## 2. Policy Vision

The vision of the policy is to establish Sikkim as an ultimate and unique ecotourism destination offering memorable and high quality learning experiences to visitors, and to contribute to poverty alleviation as well as to promote nature conservation.





### 3. Policy Objectives

#### 1. The main objectives of Sikkim Ecotourism Policy are to

- a. bring all stakeholders on a common platform of understanding of ecotourism;
- b. promote ecotourism in a sustainable manner based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC);
- c. generate incentives to local communities for nature conservation through alternative income sources and livelihoods, and empower local communities to manage ecotourism with the emphasis on economically disadvantaged people;
- d. conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems and religious monuments of Sikkim as well as Sikkim people's culture and tradition;
- e. offer memorable and high quality learning experience to visitors, thus encouraging their responsible behavior during their visits and their collaboration for nature conservation efforts;
- f. facilitate local children as well as visitors to enjoy and appreciate excellent nature- based activities;
- g. encourage people in Sikkim to increase their pride and appreciation of local natural and cultural values;
- h. ensure that local communities have a role in determining the appropriate presentation of their cultural values;
- i. regulate the high influx of visitors in heavily visited areas, thus reducing negative impacts of tourism.



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## 4. Key Principles of Sikkim Ecotourism

1. The following key principles shall be directed, for all forms of ecotourism for the development, planning, management, and promotion in the state of Sikkim;-

a. conserve nature, including biodiversity and ecosystems as well as the culture and traditions of Sikkim;

b. respect local communities' culture, tradition and customs;

c. adhere to international ecotourism principles, guidelines and standards for the development of ecotourism in the state of Sikkim;

d. generate income sources to local communities, preferably to economically disadvantaged, through ecotourism activities;

e. promote sustainable use of natural,

cultural and local resources to develop and promote ecotourism in the state with the emphasis on the use of renewable energy;

f. facilitate partnership for planning, implementation, coordination and monitoring ecotourism activities with key stakeholders such as local communities, NGOs, government organizations, tour agents and tour operators;

g. enhance cooperation between local entrepreneurs, such as home stay operators, tour operators and tour agents, and government organizations and other key players in the development of ecotourism infrastructures and promotion of ecotourism products;

h. encourage visitors to learn about biodiversity and ecosystems as well as local people's cultural and traditional values.

## 5. Definition related to Sikkim Ecotourism

Definitions of the key terms related to ecotourism are as follows



**1. Ecotourism:** A form of tourism that involves travelling to natural areas with the specific objectives of learning, admiring and enjoying nature and its wild plants and animals as well as local people's cultural aspects including religious monuments, while conserving the natural and social environment, and improving the welfare of the local people.

**2. Ecotourism Activities:** Activities coordinated by a qualified nature and cultural interpreter designed to entertain and educate clients.

**Examples of above mentioned activities are;-**

- a. activities in mountains such as trekking, bird and wildlife watching, hiking, photography, mountaineering etc;
- b. activities in rivers and lakes such as angling, rafting, kayaking, photography etc;
- c. participating in cultural and traditional events such as agro-tourism, handicraft making, fairs and festivals and Himalayan folkways.

**3. Sustainable Ecotourism Development:** Development of ecotourism in the State of Sikkim, which meets the needs and aspirations of the current generation without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations.

**4. Ecotourism Assets:** Natural and cultural features that attract visitors, such as landscapes, endemic or rare flora and fauna, local agricultural products, local culture including festivals, local folktales, history, historical monuments and heritage sites.

**5. Ecotour Operators:** Tour operators specializing to cater ecotours collaborating with local people focused on local nature and culture based tourism.

**6. Ecotourism Products:** A combination of activities and services which are sold and managed through qualified ecotour operators including local communities or individuals.

**7. Ecotourism Services:** Services including transportation, local cuisine, camping, home stay, 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.

**8. Interpretation:** Communication that helps visitors to 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 center, parks and etc.



## 6. Sikkim Ecotourism Council

The Sikkim Ecotourism Council will be an autonomous council as outlined in the organizational diagram. The Sikkim Ecotourism Council will have an executing arm which is the Ecotourism Directorate (ED) working under the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department (FEWMD). The Council will have a local village level operational system which incorporates various Community-Based Organizations (CBO) working in tandem with Panchayat, Non Governmental Organisation, Tourism Development Committee (TDC), Self-help Groups (SHG) and other local people's representative groups.



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### Members of Sikkim Ecotourism Council are as follows.

Chief Patron	:	Chief Minister
Two Patrons	:	Minister of Forest and Minister of Tourism
Chairman	:	Chief Secretary
Member Secretary	:	PCCF-cum-Secretary, Forest Department (FEWMD)
Member	:	Chief Wildlife Warden
Member	:	Secretary, Tourism Department
Member	:	Secretary, Rural Management & Development Department
Member	:	Secretary, Animal Husbandry, Livestock, Fisheries and Veterinary Services Department
Member	:	Secretary, Home Department
Member	:	Secretary, Sports & Youth affairs
Member	:	Director, Ecotourism Directorate
Member	:	Person of National Ecotourism Expertise
Member	:	National Level NGO
Members	:	Four Local Level NGO and CBO
Member	:	Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS)
Member	:	Sikkim Association of Adventure Tour Operators (SAATO)
Member	:	Sikkim Hotel and Restaurant Association (SHRA)



## 6.1 Organizational Strategy

**To organize and ensure an effective management and implementation of ecotourism objectives and principles in the state of Sikkim, the following organizational strategies are essential;-**

- a.** creation of an autonomous Sikkim Ecotourism Council which is represented by civil society, tourism professionals and public sector representatives;
- b.** strong coordination with the Tourism Department and Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (STDC) for the promotion and publicity of ecotourism products and destinations;
- c.** coordination with the Rural Management and Development Department for infrastructure development such as, water, sanitation, village trails and footpaths;
- d.** as per the directives of the Ecotourism Council, the Ecotourism Directorate (ED) of FEWMD will execute the programmes and activities, and shall monitor the development and progress of ecotourism in the state. ED shall work together with NGO and the state level federation of CBO to implement

ecotourism activities. Also ED will work in coordination with the village level bodies which are led by CBO, TDC, SHG and other local people's representatives engaging ecotourism activities to implement the activities and monitor the negative impacts of ecotourism. Those groups (CBO, TDC, and SHG) will work closely with EDC, JFMC, PSS and Panchayat;

**e.** the Council will have assistance from the key government organizations and scientific research institutions such as universities described as an advisory group as well as a group of international and domestic experts illustrated in the organizational diagram;

**f.** ED shall work in close collaboration with key government organizations such as, Tourism Department, Rural Management and Development Department, Animal Husbandry, Livestock, Fisheries and Veterinary Services Department, Horticulture and Cash Crops Development Department, Home Department, Commerce Department, Sport and Youth Department, scientific research institutions such as universities and civil society bodies including local and national level NGO and CBO.





## 6.2 Roles of Sikkim Ecotourism Council

The Sikkim Ecotourism Council shall;-

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- a. bring all key stakeholders on a common platform of understanding of ecotourism activities carried out by ED;
- b. coordinate all key stakeholders to work on the ecotourism activities carried out by ED and reflect their opinion to the activities;
- c. establish guidelines for ecotourism, and revise them in consultation with the key stakeholders including NGO, CBO, local communities, tour operators, tour agents and relevant government authorities from time to time as per the requirements;
- d. ensure that the new guidelines are consistent with the Code of Conduct for responsible tourism prepared by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India and adopted by Dept of Tourism and Civil Aviation (Govt. of Sikkim);
- e. monitor the activities of ecotourism to ensure minimum negative impacts on the biodiversity and ecosystems of Sikkim. Emphasis should be on the carrying capacity of the Protected Areas (PAs) in Sikkim including Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP);
- f. evaluate the negative impacts brought by ecotourism activities and existing rules and regulations, and review and revise the rules in consultation with the stakeholders which have direct or indirect influence to the ecotourism activities as and when necessary;
- g. review and finalise a draft ecotourism action plan and a long-term development plan which are prepared by ED;
- h. monitor the trainings and capacity building carried out by ED;
- i. monitor and influence the activities of private entities which violate the main principles of Sikkim Ecotourism, through relevant organizations;
- j. request tour operators, guides and home stay owners to provide information on Sikkim's ecotourism products and ecotourism services, since this information is needed for planning and monitoring of ecotourism activities;
- k. establish Sikkim ecotourism safety standards and emergency procedures and facilitate the implementation of emergency procedures with relevant organizations in case of accidents.

## 6.3 Roles of Ecotourism Directorate (ED)

The roles of ED are as follows



### (A) Planning and Development:

- i. ensure the implementation and execution of the ecotourism guidelines;
- ii. coordinate with the Home Department, and other related key government organizations in border sensitive ecotourism sites to ensure the smooth operation of ecotourism activities;
- iii. implement the strategies described in Sikkim Ecotourism Policy;
- iv. organize seminars, workshops and international conferences among concerned government officials, NGO, CBO, and other stakeholders, from time to time so as to consider the emerging needs/suggestions etc from all sections of society.

### (B) Financing:

- i. monitor the revenue generation and allocation of funds for the development of ecotourism;
- ii. develop a plough back mechanism with an autonomous status for funds generated for sustainability of ecotourism related activities.

### (C) Operation and Management:

- i. work in close collaboration with NGO and state level of CBO to implement the ecotourism activities;

- ii. collaborate with NGO, CBO, TDC, SHG and other local people's representative groups to implement the ecotourism activities at the village level;
- iii. set standards for the carrying capacity in the Protected Areas and other Reserved Areas to prevent damage to the biodiversity and ecosystems;
- iv. publish newsletters, bulletins, pamphlets, status reports and other information and disseminate important government notifications and rules;
- v. ensure visitors, tour operators, tour agencies and guides to follow the prescribed guidelines.

### (D) Monitoring, Evaluation and Research:

- i. monitor the environmental impacts which are caused by tourism activities and plan/take necessary remedial measures to mitigate the same;
- ii. enlist ecotourism operators in the state and monitor their activities;
- iii. facilitate scientific assessment of relatively unexplored ecotourism destinations for their potential and promotion;
- iv. develop participatory ecotourism monitoring plans in collaboration with NGO, CBO, SHG, TDC, Panchayat, EDC, PSS and JFMC;
- v. monitor the training and capacity building programmes that are conducted by various other agencies and provide support and cooperation;
- vi. conduct research and document ecotourism assets and features.



# 7. Strategies of Sikkim Ecotourism Development



Strategies of Sikkim Ecotourism Development are as follows;

## 7.1 Strategies for planning, zoning and modelling for the Ecotourism sites and other general tourism sites.

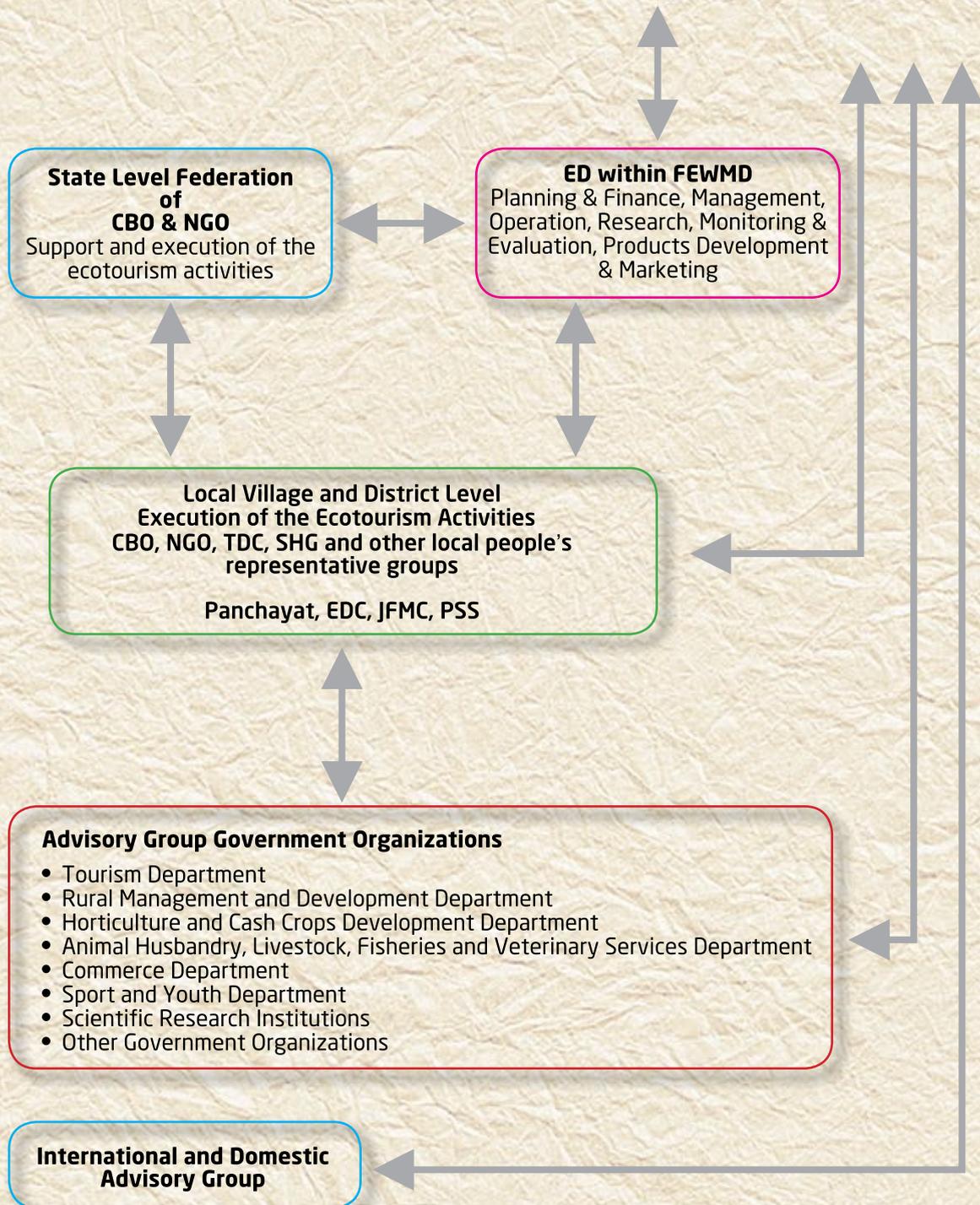
Strategies for zoning and modelling for the ecotourism sites and other tourism sites are;-

- a. FEWMD and Tourism Department work together to identify the ecotourism zones and general tourism zones;
- b. prior to establishment of the ecotourism zoning, plan consultations with the local NGO, CBO, TDC, SHG and other local people's representative groups as well as key government organizations such as Rural Management and Development Department on the issue of the ecotourism zoning at each area;
- c. establish zonings for ecotourism development sites, which will be called ecotourism zone hereafter, and general tourism development zone, and differentiate the two zones in Sikkim;
- d. select villages from the ecotourism zone and establish a model from each district and focus on efforts on allocating finance, manpower for capacity building and facilities and equipments, and disseminate the successful cases to the other ecotourism zone;
- e. make some variation of the ecotourism zone which has specific objectives such as, ecotourism zones for trekking, ecotourism zones for bird watching, ecotourism zones for flower photography;
- f. regulate the design and appearance of new ecotourism infrastructures such as, accommodations, view points, footpaths, and restaurants that blend with the landscape;
- g. regulate the construction of roads in ecotourism zones based on the local needs.



## Sikkim Ecotourism Council

Coordinate, Evaluate, Monitor, Establish, Review & Reflect Opinion



## 7.2 Strategies for Training and Capacity Building

Strategies for training and capacity building are to



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**a.** train and build the capacity of local communities including home stay owners, youth and women's groups who wish to engage on ecotourism activities. The topic of the training and capacity building are specific themes such as, environmental education, home stay management, waste management, computing, finance, ecotour program designing, interpretation, risk management, cooking local cuisine, guides for trekking, bird watching, fauna and flora photography, angling, rafting, religious monuments and languages;

**b.** prepare and provide training materials including training manuals, text books and training courses;

**c.** provide technical capacity building for tour operators, CBO, NGO, frontline staff of FEWMD as well as various stakeholders including STDC, EDC, JFMC, PSS and Panchayat;

**d.** identify village level CBO's engaging on ecotourism activities, and provide necessary capacity building to them;

**e.** identify and review the existing regulations and bye-laws and other legal issues related village level ecotourism activities. Support CBO to clarify those issues prior to commence the ecotourism activities;

**f.** plan certificate courses for nature interpreters and ecotour guides for trekking, bird watching, fauna and flora photography and other activities;

**g.** identify low season income generation activities to complement ecotourism such as handicraft souvenirs, food and fruit processing, production, repairing and maintenance of adventure equipments;

**h.** provide training and capacity building to FEWMD staff as well as Tourism Department staff within the state to understand the clear meaning of ecotourism as an activity supported and monitored by FEWMD to be driven by CBO.

## 7.3 Strategies for Benefiting the Economically Disadvantaged People

Strategies for benefiting the economically disadvantaged people are to;-

- a. facilitate self employment opportunities for the economically disadvantaged people in ecotourism enterprises;
- b. encourage supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises by the economically disadvantaged people;
- c. facilitate direct sales of local goods and services to visitors by the economically disadvantaged people (informal economy);
- d. encourage establishment and running of tourism enterprises by the economically disadvantaged people - e.g. micro, small and medium sized enterprises, or community based enterprises (formal economy);



- e. set up systems of voluntary support by tourism enterprises and tourists to the economically disadvantaged people.





## 7.4 Strategies for Stakeholder Partnership and Departmental Convergence

### Strategies for stakeholder partnership are to

- a. develop a quarterly meeting with the Tourism Department in form of workshop attended by the senior officers of the Forest and Tourism Departments to avoid duplication and build more synergy between the two departments on the schemes of ecotourism;
- b. develop partnership with local stakeholders and tour operators / tour agents to develop ecotourism business in a fair trade manner;
- c. develop partnership with NGO, CBO, TDC, SHG /EDC, JFMC and PSS and local communities to manage ecotourism sites;
- d. establish and enhance networks with key stakeholders including research institutions, private sector associations, public agencies, CBO, TDC,SHG and national and international NGO's;
- e. hold seminars and events to discuss and deliberate on ecotourism achievements with participation of key stakeholders including key government organizations;
- f. disseminate information related to ecotourism to key stakeholders in the four districts;
- g. hold annual meetings of ecotourism stakeholders, policy makers, EDC, JFMC, PSS, Panchayat, NGO, CBO, TDC, SHG, private sector on a rational basis in each district.

## 7.5 Strategies for Products Development

Strategies for products development are to



**a.** enhance and improve current products such as, improving infrastructure of current trekking routes and interconnecting existing routes;

**b.** develop a series of maps of ecotourism sites and activities (sites to visit, distance, required time, geographical features, altitudes, available services, local rules, rules for ecotour, resources interpretation etc.) in Sikkim in sustainable manner and update it regularly;

**c.** promote village tourism through micro planning both short and medium terms include;

**i.** ecotourism potential-feasibilities;

**ii.** clear roles of responsibilities for key stakeholders in decentralized manner;

**iii.** business plan for ecotourism (benefit sharing, marketing and business, price rates and services standards, products, financing, personnel, risk management, etc.);

**iv.** waste management plan (garbage treatment);

**v.** tourism infrastructure management;

**vi.** carrying capacity of visitors;

**vii.** village conservation plan.

**d.** develop ecotourism for different target groups (adults, children, family, experts and hobbyists, etc);

**e.** improve the skills of ecotour guides and local interpreters;

**f.** improve current home; stay facilities such as toilets, shower, bedroom and dining rooms which meet the need of visitors especially from foreign countries;

**g.** promote local communities to produce agricultural products such as, organic vegetables, honey, dairy products and rice, to offer as local cuisines;

**h.** promote local communities to produce local handicrafts and other local souvenirs on a sustainable manner with minimum impacts on ecosystems and its own culture;

**i.** develop new ecotourism products such as, bird watching trails, fauna and flora photography, trails, medicinal tourism,

traditional and cultural experience tours such as, craft making, cooking, dancing, one day or more hikes to wetlands of Sikkim as well as rivers, highlighting the high and low altitude lakes;

**j.** promote festivals which have direct relation to nature and biodiversity conservation such as, orchid flower festival, bird watching festival, and trekking festival;

**k.** encourage Interpretation Centers to also function as Ecotourism Promotion Centers;

**l.** promote environmental friendly lodges, managed by either local individuals or local communities in or near wilderness areas;

**m.** repair and maintain rest houses owned by FEWMD and lease to CBO, EDC, JFMC for management;

**n.** ensure fair and equal treatment for the strict ecological safety and protection rules to be followed by all the stakeholders.

## 7.6 Strategies for Infrastructure Development and Carrying Capacity Analysis

Strategies for infrastructure development and carrying capacity analysis are to

**a.** prohibit concrete infrastructures and building structures inside PAs;

**b.** construct / Improve appropriate infrastructures around PAs such as, visitor friendly signboards with interpretive manners, footpaths, garbage bins, interpretation centre including informative maps showing the trekking routes, toilets and view points at the entrance of each of PAs;

**c.** promote renewable energy systems for tourism purposes;

**d.** conduct carrying capacity analysis inside PAs;

**e.** develop flexible and sustainable approaches to ensuring solid waste management in the eco-tourism designated areas.





## 7.7 Strategies for Promotion/ Publicity/ Marketing and Feedback Mechanism

Strategies for promotion / publicity / marketing and feedback mechanism are to

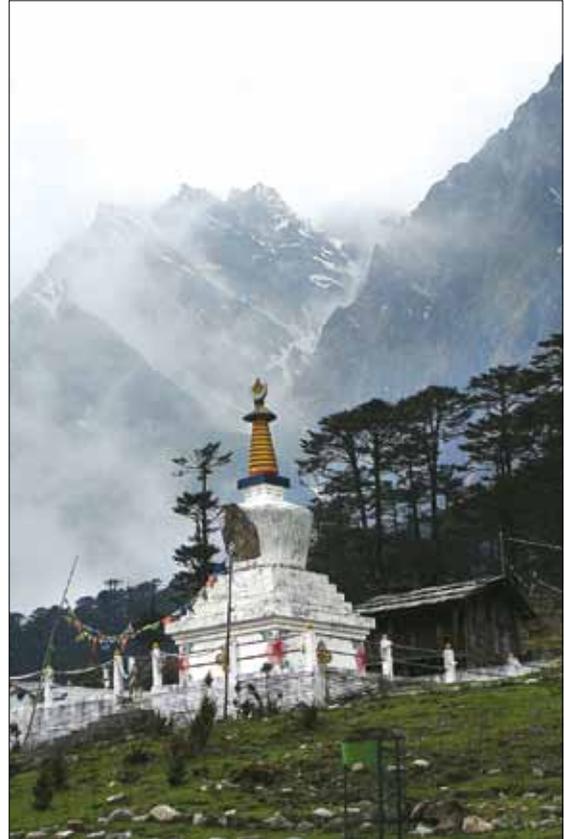
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- a.** five clear definitions of the terms related to ecotourism (e.g. village guide, home stay);
- b.** create an ecotourism marketing cell within FEWMD which handles for ecotourism marketing;
- c.** create a common platform for marketing of ecotourism which includes FEWMD ecotourism marketing cell, other government organizations, STDC, TAAS, SAATO, TDC, SHG, NGO, CBO and other local people's representative handling ecotourism;
- d.** promote branding of Sikkim with tag line and brand ambassador for ecotourism and subsequently preparation of the state ecotourism marketing strategies and marketing plans for domestic and international markets;
- e.** participate in national and international tourism trade marts;
- f.** plan the promotion through media such as, tie-ups with travel TV programs, magazines, travel books, internet portals etc;
- g.** plan ground promotions at various shopping malls or important events in domestic markets to enhance domestic tourism;
- h.** plan a transparent pricing system for the visitors and services providers;
- i.** plan a direct link between services providers and the visitors through electric online payment gateway;
- j.** develop appropriate packaging and branding of ecotourism destinations;
- k.** develop websites along with search engine optimization in various languages and making some comprehensive CD-Rom for distribution;
- l.** promote Sikkim as a year round ecotourism destination.

## 7.8 Strategies for Safety

Strategies for safety are to

- a. require insurance for tour operators, guides, tour agents whose clients may have accidents and injuries during their trip, and require guides to carry first aid kit when they are in the field with their clients;
- b. plan training and issuing certificates system for safety including risk management. The training will focus on methods of risk management avoid problems, medication to save clients and quick rescue operation to all the tour operators, guides, tour agents whose clients may have accidents and injuries caused by the engagement of tourism activities;
- c. plan a system of notifying landslides high risk areas as well as other dangerous places for visitors by ED to the tour operators, tour agents, guides and drivers of vehicles through the related associations on a regular basis;
- d. develop a series of hazardous maps of ecotourism sites (places, characteristics of hazardous, etc.) in Sikkim in sustainable manner and update it regularly;
- e. plan a quick response team for an event of any kinds of accidents related ecotourism activities;



- f. plan a system of emergency call for medical doctors an event of visitors' sickness or injuries.

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## 7.9 Strategies for Certification

Strategies for certification are to

- a. plan to constitute a committee which includes STDC, TAAS, SAATO, TDC, NGO and CBO to work on certification related to the ecotourism activities (e.g. home stay, ecotour operators, environmental friendly lodges) ;
- b. make the certification process transparent based on specific guidelines which

are monitored through social auditing;

- c. encourage the ED, STDC, TAAS, SAATO, TDC, NGO and CBO to work together to identify necessary certification items related to ecotourism activities such as renewable energy, ecotour guide. They will plan further courses for the identified items.



## 7.10 Strategies for Finance

### Strategies for finance are to

a. provide financial support to encourage people to take part in new ecotourism ventures. This will be done through a flexible approach that meets the needs of different clients.

b. provide small scale funding to community groups that want to engage in village-based ecotourism activities via grants from the government;

c. encourage banks to provide loans at reasonable interest rates targeting the local people who wish to engage in ecotourism activities by providing government loan guarantees;

d. develop Women Saving and Credit Groups (WSCG) for consumptive and productive loans and connecting it with rural development banks for additional funding;

e. conduct a public awareness campaign to make people aware of the various options for obtaining finance for new ecotourism activities;

f. develop a long term plan for supporting ecotourism marketing activities in the State. This plan will combine several potential approaches, such as direct government allocation, creating new hotel taxes, establishing a wider tourism tax, collecting membership fees from firms in the tourist sector, and private sector sponsorship.



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## 7.11 Strategies for Awareness and Education on Ecotourism, Environmental Conservation and Waste Management

### Strategies for awareness and education on ecotourism, environmental conservation and waste management are to

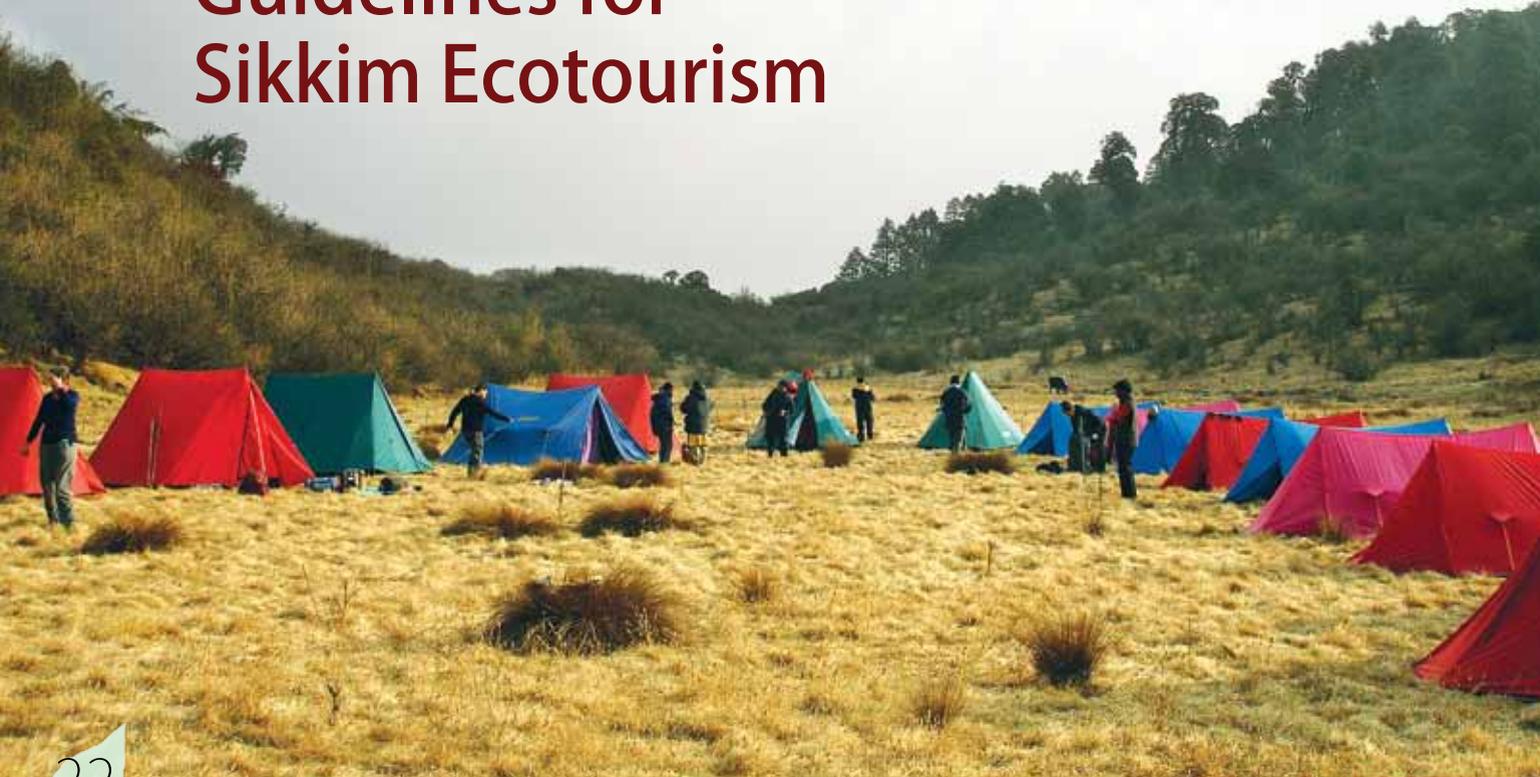
a. plan awareness programmes on ecotourism policy contents, its guidelines and function of ecotourism council including line departments and local communities;

b. plan awareness and educational

programmes for local communities and school children on environment conservation and waste management;

c. plan nature-based activities for local children managed by qualified ecotour guides.

# Guidelines for Sikkim Ecotourism



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## 1. Objectives

The objectives of the guidelines described below are to conserve the biodiversity and ecosystem of the Protected Areas in Sikkim and address the rules for trekkers, mountaineers, tour operators, guides, researchers and all other visitors to the Protected Areas. Guidelines set out for the outside of the Protected Areas for the ecotourism operators and guides operating within Sikkim attempt to facilitate the nature conservation as well as ensure their clients' safety.

**The guidelines are for the people mentioned below.**

- a. for visitors such as trekkers, mountaineers;
- b. for ecotourism services operators such as, trekking service providers, trekking companies;
- c. for guides such as, trekking guides, mountaineering guides, bird watching guides;
- d. for research scholars;
- e. for visitors other than the types mentioned above

## 2. Areas for Guidelines

The following guidelines are defined by the areas which are Protected Areas and the outside of the Protected Areas.



## 2.1 Protected Areas

Two guidelines, one for “**Guidelines for Ecotourism Operators and Guides**”, and the other for “**Guidelines for Visitors and Research Scholars**” for the Protected Areas are described below.



### (1) Guidelines for Ecotourism Operators and Guides

Guidelines for service providers include ecotourism operators and guides are as follows.

#### (I) The Service Providers shall

- a. engage trekking service providers who are genuine Sikkim subjects and possess the certificate of identification;
- b. engage pack animals owned by genuine Sikkim subjects and possess the certificate of identification;
- c. ensure that fair wages are paid according to the prescribed rates;
- d. provide adequate cooked food for the trekking service providers while in a wildlife area and ensure that they do not use firewood;
- e. obtain a permit and pay prescribed fees before entering a wildlife area;
- f. register at the forest /wildlife check posts before entering a wildlife area;
- g. arrange to carry sufficient kerosene and LPG for heating and cooking purpose;
- h. the pack animal operator shall arrange for fodder for the pack animals and ensure that they do not graze freely in wildlife areas;
- i. obtain permission from the State Home Department and also from State Chief Wildlife Warden, Forest for Alpine Expedition;
- j. segregate degradable and non-degradable litters and burn or bury all bio-degradable items and carry back all other non-degradable items;
- k. keep to the permitted nature trails and treks;
- l. inform the nearest wildlife check post, in case the parties come across forest fire, wildlife offence by someone, death/carcass of wild animals during their nature trip;
- m. prepare and carry medical first aid kits for your clients take them to the trip;
- n. arrange insurance for your clients when you take them to the trip;
- o. educate visitors on community based ecotourism initiatives and the guidelines before start of the tour/trek.

## (II) The Service Providers shall not

- a. use firewood or kindle fire or throw cigarettes butts in wildlife and forest areas;
- b. damage or cut shrubs or thickets;
- c. pollute water body;
- d. collect plants or their parts;
- e. bring with them dogs, cats and other pet animals;
- f. feed, shout, tease, chase, disturb or molest wild animals;
- g. play loud music or use loud speakers;
- h. camp outside the designated campsites;
- i. trek outside of the designated natural trails;
- j. defecate within 100 meters of any water body;
- k. camp within 500 meters of the periphery of any lake;
- m. defile sites of religious and cultural significance such as sacred monuments, lakes rocks, caves and shrines;
- n. commit any other act that may be injurious to forests, water bodies, plants, animals or disturb the natural tranquility of such sites or become a nuisance to other trekkers;
- o. leave any non-biodegradable materials in wildlife area during a trek, and such materials shall be declared at the forest/wildlife check-post both before and after the entry;
- p. sell liquor, drugs and other intoxicants;
- q. carry out any research study or study within wildlife area without the prior permission of the Government;
- r. indulge in hunting of any animals or carry on the business of buying and selling any animals, animal articles, antique cultural artifacts, trophy, uncured trophy or meat of wild animals and specified plants;
- s. destroy or remove any wildlife, infrastructures and plants/trees, sign boards of the protected areas;
- t. swim in lakes, rivers or approach glaciers inside the National Park/Protected Areas or camp in areas of wildlife interest or their habitats;
- u. collect specimens of wildlife without permission of the competent authority.



## (2) Guidelines for Visitors and Research Scholars

### Guidelines for Visitors and Research Scholars are as follows:-

#### (I) Visitors and Research Scholars shall:

- a. engage trekking service providers who are genuine Sikkim subjects and possess the certification of identification;
- b. ensure proper permits are taken by their service providers;
- c. register at the forest /wildlife check posts before entering a wildlife area;
- d. ensure that the service provider is carrying sufficient kerosene and LPG for heating and cooking purpose;
- e. keep to the permitted nature trails and treks;
- f. segregate degradable and non-degradable litters and burn or bury all bio-degradable items and carry back all other non-degradable items;



g. also inform the nearest wildlife check post, in case the parties come across forest fire, wildlife offence by someone, death carcass of wild animals during their nature trip;

h. obtain permission from the State Home Department and also from State Chief Wildlife Warden, Forest for Alpine Expedition.

#### (II) Visitors and Research Scholars shall not:-

- a. use firewood or kindle fire in wildlife and forest areas;
- b. damage or cut shrubs or thickets;
- c. pollute water body;
- d. collect plants or their parts;
- e. bring with them dogs, cats and other pet animals;
- f. feed, shout, tease, chase, disturb or molest wild animals;
- g. play loud music or use loud speakers;
- h. camp outside the designated campsites;
- i. trek outside of the designated natural trails;
- j. defecate within 100 meters of any water body;
- k. camp within 500 meters of the periphery of any lake;
- l. cause environmental pollution;
- m. defile sites of religious and cultural significance such as sacred monuments, lakes rocks, caves and shrines especially by inscribing names, using paint etc;
- n. commit any other act that may be injurious to forests, water bodies, plants, animals or disturb the natural tranquility of such sites or become a nuisance to other trekkers;
- o. leave any non-biodegradable materials in wildlife area during a trek, and such materials shall be declared at the forest/wildlife check-post both before and after the entry;



- p.** sell liquor, drugs and other intoxicants within a wildlife area;
- q.** carry out any research study or study within wildlife area without the prior permission of the Government;
- r.** indulge in hunting of any animals or carry on the business of buying and selling any animals, animal articles, antique cultural artifacts, trophy, uncured trophy or meat of wild animals and specified plants;
- s.** destroy or remove any wildlife, infrastructures and plants/trees, sign boards of the protected areas;
- t.** swim in lakes, rivers or approach glaciers inside the National Park/Protected Areas or camp in areas of wildlife interest or their habitats;
- u.** collect specimens of wildlife without permission of the competent authority.



## 2.2 Non-Protected Areas

### 1. Ecotourism Operators and Guides shall:-

- a. do small scale tourism limiting group sizes to optimum carrying capacity minimizing negative impacts on fragile ecosystems;
- b. do not allow clients to purchase endangered animal parts or antique cultural artefacts;
- c. prepare and carry medical first aid kits for clients;
- d. arrange insurance for clients;
- e. collect feedback from the local community as well as tourists when planning future tours.

### 2. Visitors and Research Scholars shall:-

- a. listen to the opinions of scientists and conservation NGOs as well as local communities when planning tour activities;
- b. follow all the rules and regulations enforced the visiting areas;
- c. hold orientation sessions for tourists prior to running activities;

d. hire guides who are familiar with ecotourism;

e. support local conservation effort and income generation activities such as, favour accommodation services managed by local individuals or community.

### 3. Penalties

1. Penalties for the person, private entities, such as tour operators, tour agents, or any other organizations who violate the guidelines set for the Protected Areas under the Notification No:887, Sikkim Wildlife (Regulation of Trekking) Rules, 2005, dated 10/02/2006, and Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

2. FEWMD / CBO should devise penalties based on social auditing to the service providers who are at fault for cheating tourists to ensure that it is not repeated in future.



## PROCESS INVOLVED IN FORMULATION OF THE SIKKIM ECOTOURISM POLICY

The Government of Sikkim addresses ecotourism as a priority sector and therefore, the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy has been developed proactively by State with an aim to not only to ensure sustainable livelihood of the local people but to protect and manage forest, as well.

The first draft of the Policy document was prepared after an international level experience sharing workshop organized at Gangtok on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2010 that was chaired by Shri. S.M.Limboo, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman of the State Planning Commission and was attended by Dr. Kelly Bricker, the Chair, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), Mr. Manfred Seebauer, Team leader, Gujarat Forestry Development Project and many other national ecotourism specialists like Mr. Josse Dominic, Ecotourism Society of India, Mr. Hakei Junger Sharma, Consultant, GTZ, heads of various state Government Departments, representatives of local tourism bodies like TASS, SATTO, SHRA, other national and international NGOs viz WWF, TMI , ECOSS and other local community representatives.

This international workshop was followed by stakeholders meetings in all the four districts of the State. To make the Policy truly participatory, views, suggestions and advice of the respective district level stakeholders were obtained. This was to ensure that the stakeholders have a common understanding of the concept of ecotourism and that tourism infrastructures are constructed respecting acceptable environmental standards. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has provided financial assistance for formulation of the policy and also appointed Mr.Kazuishi Watabe, a short term ecotourism expert from Japan, who has extending help in formulation of the Policy while remaining in Sikkim for nearly 3 months.

The Policy was finalized after a state level workshop organized under the Chairmanship of Sh Bhim Dhungel, Hon'ble Minister Forest, Tourism and Civil Aviation on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011 which was attended by all the stakeholders.