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Singalila Ecotourism Promotion Zone

In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (b) of section 33, read with sub-section (8) of section 35 and sub-section (2) of section 36A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (53 of 1972), clause (d) of section 76 of Indian Forest Act 1927 (16 of 1927), and clause (i) of sub-section (2) of section 83 of the Sikkim Forests, Water Courses And Road Reserve (Preservation And Protection) Act, 1988 (6 of 1988), the State Government hereby makes the following notification:-

1. Background and Need

It is essential to have zonation of protected areas for their effective management. Protected Areas should be zoned according to values in smaller pockets not necessarily as large cores, but a mosaic of smaller, manageable cores, spread in an area with tempered human use. Other zones for incentive programmes such as community based ecotourism need to be defined and set aside. The smaller cores should act as 'source' populations for sustaining wildlife populations of endangered species outside.

2. Aims and Objectives

With an objective to promote sustainable community based ecotourism with minimum negative impacts and provide incentives to the local community from conservation, the Singalila ecotourism promotion zone is being defined and set aside in West Sikkim district. The Singalila ecotourism zone comprises of 4 approved treks and 27 designated camping sites.

3. Criteria for designating nature trails and camping sites

Existing nature trails and camping sites have been preferred. Three new round trekking trails Everest Singalila, Yambong Singalila and Areylungchok Dzongri are being promoted in order to reduce the impacts along the already overcrowded Khangchendzonga Base Camp trek. Camping right on the bank of high altitude lakes and in areas of critical conservation importance is to be discontinued.

4. Existing status, threats and gaps

Community based Ecotourism is an important source of seasonal income for the villagers residing in remote areas. The impacts of unmanaged tourism are accelerating the rate of destruction in areas, which were once regarded as inaccessible. The negative impacts of unplanned tourism like deforestation due to the use of firewood, unhygienic sanitation, garbage accumulation, smuggling of plants and animals have to be regulated and at the same time the benefits arising from this enterprise equitably shared. Unplanned tourism also threatens sensitive and biologically important high altitude wetlands.

Unplanned tourism related pressure on the forest in terms of the firewood used for heating and cooking purposes has been more distinctly visible at some camping places. Water runoffs along the trail due to continuous trampling by the pack animals are bringing about soil loss along the trail and in the pasturelands. Lack of proper garbage management system by the tourists, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) trainees and their support staff in this high altitude tourist destination has led to continuous accumulation of garbage on the route up to Goecha La, HMI base camp and the surrounding sacred lake area. Another concern is the stray dogs, which accompany these trekking groups and prey on the ground nesting birds and lesser mammals. The pack animals e.g. horses, dzos and yaks used in the tourism enterprise compete with the wild herbivores for accessing the limited fodder resources in the summer pastures.

Due to the limited accommodation in the trekkers huts most of the tourists do camping in tents and toilet tents are widely used. Since campsites are not designated this has resulted in camping and setting up of toilet tents as per convenience. The porters and other support staff often defecate in the adjoining forests resulting in a spread of pollution. There is a shortage of permanent, functional, alpine toilets with running water facility in the camping sites. Also the pack animals do not have shelters at the designated camping sites.

5. Baseline Habitat Survey during the summer of 2004 and 2005

Habitat surveys were conducted during the summer of 2004 and 2005 covering the Everest Singalila Trek, Yambong Singalila Trek, Khangchendzonga Base Camp Trek and the Arelungchok Dzongri Trek. During this survey critical wildlife habitats were identified at Yongzokdrak, Lampokhri, Arelungchok, and Narsing for Blue Sheep, Medicinal Plants, Musk Deer and Himalayan Tahr respectively. Subsequently consultations with the villagers was organized at Yuksam, Nambu and Labdang based on which these trekking routes have been finalized, ensuring minimum impact to wildlife sensitive habitats and at the same time providing alternative livelihoods to the local community.

6. Boundaries

The Singalila Ecotourism Promotion Zone in West Sikkim district shall comprise of four approved treks namely Khangchendzonga Base Camp, Yambong Singalila, Arelungchok Dzongri and the Everest Singalila and comprise of the designated nature trails and designated camping sites.

7. Designated Nature Trails and Designated Campsites for ecotourism

The following treks are operational within Khangchendzonga National Park, Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary and adjoining Reserve Forests in West Sikkim. The Khangchendzonga Base Camp is a trek operational since a long time, while the Yambong-Singalila, Everest-Singalila and Arelungchok-Dzongri are relatively new. The designated nature trail and camping sites need to be notified to ensure that the trekkers stick to the designated trails. They can switch from one trail to another only at the intersection points of the two trails. The following treks, nature trails and campsites are being notified in the Singalila Ecotourism Promotion Zone in West Sikkim.

Trek No.	Trek Name	Designated Nature trails in forest area	Designated Campsites in forest area
1	Khangchendzonga Base Camp Trek Entry Point: Yuksam Exit Point: Yuksam	Existing nature trail starting from Yuksam and passing sequentially through Sachen, Bakhim, Tshoka, Phedang, Dzungri, Doring Taar, Chonrigang, Koktshurung, Thangsing and Lamune and back	Sachen, Bakhim, Tshoka, Phedang, Dzungri, Doring Taar, Chonrigang, Koktshurung,
		Only day treks are permitted to Dzungri Top, Lampokhri (Lam Tsho), Sungmoteng Tsho (Samiti Lake) upto Teen Kune Pokhri, Tshoka to Gunsa / Jamlingang, and from Koktshurung to Phedang (lower route)	Thangsing and Lamune
2	Yambong-Singalila Trek Entry Point: Nambu Exit Point: Yuksam And vice versa	The nature trail from Rimbi to Dechenphuk (Neytham) and from Chongri passing sequentially through Nayapatal, Lower Yambong, Upper Yambong, Daphey bheer, Gomathang, Pangding, Chonrigang and then to Dzungri where it joins the Khangchendzonga Base Camp trek Only day treks are permitted to Lachmi Pokhri	Dechenphuk (Neytham), Nayapatal, Lower Yambong, Upper Yambong, Gomathang, Pangding
3	Everest – Singalila Trek Entry Point: Hee Bermiok, Hilley, Soreng Exit Point: Uttarey, Nambu or Yuksam and vice versa	The nature trail from Hee Bermiok and passing sequentially through Samma Taar, Barsey, Jorbotey, Kalijhaar, Phalut, Chewabhanjyang, Chitrey, and then to Dechenphuk (Neytham) where it joins the Yambong – Singalila trek or drop down to Uttarey village The nature trail from Hilley to Barsey and from Buriakhop (Soreng) to Barsey and then joining the above trail	Hilley, Samma Taar, Barsey, Jorbotey, Kalijhaar, Phalut, Chewabhanjyang, Chitrey
4	Areylungchok – Dzungri Trek Entry Point: Labdang Exit Point: Yuksam	The nature trail from Labdang and passing sequentially through Kasturi Urar, Khola Urar / Chamrey and then to Thangsing where it joins the Khangchendzonga Base Camp trek.	Kasturi Urar (above Labdang) Khola Urar / Chamrey
	Only one way trek is permitted, starting from Labdang	This trek passes through the wildlife sensitive habitats namely the Areylungchok musk deer conservation zone and the Lampokhri medicinal plants conservation zone. Pack animals (horses, dzos and yaks) are not permitted on this trek. Lighting fire or cooking food is permitted only at the designated campsites	

8. Ecotourism Promotion Plan

(A) Ecotourism Promotion Initiatives

- (1) Publicity of these regulations by installing adequate signages at Yuksam, Labdang, Nambu, Uttarey, Hee Bermiok, Hilley, Barsey and near the trekkers huts, camping sites and conservation area.
- (2) Informing the travel agents, herders, pack animal operators, panchayats, JFMC/EDC and local NGOs about these regulations.
- (3) Publicity of these regulations by taking out press release and launching a website of the forest department.
- (4) Provide feedback forms and also web enabled feedback to the trekkers so that they can provide feedback on their trekking experience.
- (5) Training and capacity building of travel agents, herders, panchayats, JFMC/EDC and local NGOs about these regulations.
- (6) Designating the boundaries of the camping sites on the ground and providing basic amenities in the camping sites like running water, alpine toilets, kitchen cum porters barrack and pack animal shelters.
- (7) These ecotourism promotion initiatives should be incorporated into the existing schemes and programmes of the Khangchendzonga National Park and Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in order to provide adequate funds for implementation of this zonation and conservation management plan.
- (8) The Tourism Department may also support in the promotion and development of the Singalila Ecotourism Zone in West Sikkim.

(B) Ecotourism Regulations

- (1) Movement of visitors and support staff is prohibited outside the designated nature trails and designated camping sites.
- (2) Lighting of fire, cooking and "hot lunch" is not permitted on day treks.
- (3) Movement of pack animals (horses, dzos and yaks) is prohibited into notified conservation zones.
- (4) Movement of pack animals (horses, dzos and yaks) is prohibited on day treks.
- (5) The "code of conduct" or conservation code for trekking in forest areas has been notified by the State Government under the "Sikkim Wildlife (Regulation of Trekking) Rules 2005". The punishment and penalty for violation of the same has also been detailed therein.
- (6) These ecotourism regulations shall be enforced by the forest officers in coordination with the Ecodevelopment and Joint Forest Management Committees.
- (7) Other than forest officers, the Ecodevelopment Committees (EDC), Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC), registered Non Governmental Organizations (NGO), Himal Rakshaks and the trekking service providers shall be authorized to detect offences under these rules and arrest the offender if there is reason to believe that he

will abscond. Any person so arrested shall be handed over forthwith to the nearest forest/wildlife office.

- (8) These provisions shall apply in addition to the laws relating to forests, environment, wildlife and biodiversity.

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