

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL SOUTHERN ZONE BENCH
AT CHENNAI**

OA NO 152 OF 2024

IN THE MATTER OF:

NEWS ITEM TITLED "ANDHRA PRADESH: RISE IN FOOTHALL IN ECO-SENSITIVE AREAS POSES THREAT TO BIODIVERSITY AND WILDLIFE" APPEARING IN THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS DATED 12.02.2024.

..... Applicant

Vs

ANDHRA PRADESH POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD AND OTHERS

.... Respondent

REPORT FILED BY THE PCCF 3RD RESPONDENT

DATE – 16.09.2024



**M/s MADHURI DONTI REDDY
ADVOCATE**

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A.P. POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

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Report on the Hon'ble NGT order dated 07.08.2024 in Original Application No. 152 of 2024 in Original Application No. 254 of 2024 (PB) in response to the news item appearing in 'The Indian Express' dated 12.02.2024 titled, "Andhra Pradesh : Rise in footfall in eco-sensitive areas poses threat to biodiversity and wildlife"

It is to submit that on 12.02.2024, a news item entitled "Andhra Pradesh: rise in footfall in eco-sensitive areas poses threat to biodiversity and wildlife" was published in Indian Express newspaper, stating that *"in recent years, adventure tourism to unexplored locales, including remote hills and forests, has become increasingly popular among travellers. However, this surge in exploration comes with a concerning downside. While these journeys offer excitement and discovery, they also pose a risk to both biodiversity and native wildlife. The human footprint, evident in the form of litter and waste, not only disrupts the delicate balance of these ecosystems, but also sparks conflicts between visitors and the wildlife inhabiting these areas. Several hill stations, such as Paderu, Gudisa, and segments of the Nallamalla forest region in Andhra Pradesh, have been compelled to shut their doors temporarily to address the mounting debris issue"*.

In this connection, in the orders dt. 07.08.2024 in OA No.152 of 2024(SZ), the Hon'ble NGT, Southern Zone while posting the matter to 17.09.2024 has ordered to file a report by the PCCF & HoFF (Respondent No.3) after making a spot inspection.

It is submitted that, various initiatives taken up by the Forest Divisions of Alluri Sita Ramaraju District pertaining to plastic and other waste management w.r.t. rising foot fall in these natural forest areas are given below:

I. Initiatives taken up in Rampa Chodavaram Forest Division:

It is submitted that, Gudisa is a scenic hill station with serene atmosphere around the grassland and located at a distance of 42 Kms. from Maredumilli, and around 8-9Kms. from the ghat road starting from Pidamarri Junction and stretches till the top of the grassland. It is located in Maredumilli Range of Rampachodavaram Forest Division, and is renowned for its untouched beauty and biodiversity. The grassland offers an immersive natural experience, characterized by hills, grasslands and panoramic viewpoints.

It is submitted that, Community Based Ecotourism (CBET), Gudisa was started during 2022 by involving local tribes (PVTGs) of surrounding villages with an aim to manage eco-tourism, conserve the environment, and generate livelihood opportunities for the local tribes. The grassland area is completely covered with grass, and except the Check Post at the entrance, there are no temporary/permanent structures in this grassland. Generally, tourists tend to visit the area to witness the beautiful sun emerging out from the hills early in the mornings (Photographs enclosed).

It is submitted that, herein clarified that the temporary shutdown is in view of visitor safety, due to continuous and heavy rains in the area, but not to address the mounting debris issue, as stated in the news article.

It is to submit that, the following preventive measures are being taken up by the Forest Department for the conservation of biodiversity and native wildlife of the area:

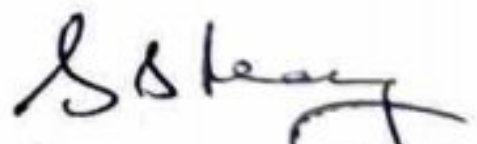
- a. Night Stay on the hilltop grassland is completely banned, so as to safeguard the biodiversity and native wildlife. In order to restrict visitor movement during nights, a Check Post manned 24x7 by local tribes is set up at the entrance of the grassland, to restrict tourist movement during night time and thereby to prevent activities viz., camp fires, alcohol consumption etc. that pose risk to biodiversity and native wildlife.
- b. Fines, as per the Acts and Rules in vogue are imposed on tourists for violation of the rules related to plastic disposal, prohibited activities etc.
- c. Disposal of plastic is done in a scientific manner by storing in dustbins and transporting down the hill to facilitate proper disposal.
- d. To regulate plastic pollution near the grassland premises, tourists are made to deposit caution deposit amount, so as to ensure returning back of the plastic waste in exchange for their caution deposit.
- e. Regular cleaning drives are conducted by employing local tribes to maintain the cleanliness of the grassland.
- f. Informational banners are displayed along the route to Gudisa to educate tourists on the importance of environmental conservation and on the prohibited activities.
- g. Fire awareness programs are conducted during the peak summer season to educate locals and tourists on fire prevention and safety.

Hence, it is to submit that the pro-active measures being taken up by the Forest Department in managing Gudisa as an eco-tourism destination are designed in such a way so as to balance visitor experience with environmental preservation. By involving the local community, regulating tourist activities, and implementing waste management and fire prevention strategies, significant strides have been made in maintaining the ecological integrity of Gudisa.

II. Initiatives taken up in Paderu Forest Division:

It is respectfully submitted that eco-tourism projects were started in the recent past taking the tourist flow into consideration mainly to create awareness about conservation of pristine and ecologically fragile environment and to educate the tourists about responsible tourism to these areas and to improve the socio-economic status of the local/ tribal communities duly involving them in the management of these ecotourism centres. There are two ecotourism projects in Paderu Division which have become quite popular recently.

1. Vanjangi Hills CBET
2. Araku Pinery Ecotourism initiative


Chief Conservator of Forests
Visakhapatnam Circle
Visakhapatnam

1. Vanjangi Hills Community Based Ecotourism (CBET):

It is submitted that the Vanjangi hills is known for its topography, misty & chill weather, picturesque beauty, natural forests and sea of clouds particularly during sunrise time. The forests / vegetation in this locality is dry Savannah (upper reaches), mixed moist deciduous forests (lower reaches). The topography is rocky with steep slopes and U-shaped valleys interspersed with plateaus making this location very attractive to tourists. The cultural heritage of Vanjangi and other surrounding tribal villages is also another reason attracting the tourists.

It is submitted that, with the above features the Vanjangi hills has got potential to develop into a good eco-tourist spot in the State. The Vanjangi hill is located in compartment no.246, 247, 248 and 249 of Vanthala RF in Paderu beat of Paderu Range in Paderu division.

It is submitted that, Vana Samrakshana Samiti or the VSS as it known is Self Help Group (SHG) under the Joint Forest Management (JFM) or the more advanced Community Forest Management (CFM) promoted by the policy makers for better protection of forest resources with active involvement of the stake holders. The forest fringe village communities are entrusted with the protection, conservation, and enjoyment of the forest resources in the forest area allotted to them.

It is submitted that, Vanjangi tourist spot comes under the jurisdiction of Vanjangi Vana Samrakshana Samiti. Members of the Vanjangi VSS resolved to set up a Community Based Ecotourism in Vanjangi for conservation of pristine and fragile ecosystem and natural areas by educating the tourists about responsible tourism to natural areas apart generating the necessary revenue not only maintain the natural ness of the place, to improve tourist amenities but also to improve the socio-economic life of locals.

It is submitted that, Vanjangi Vana Samrakshana Samithi later evolved as Community Based Eco-tourism (CBET) and an Eco-tourism center was established in Vanjangi Hills with the purpose of the giving employment to local tribal people of Village by engaging them in plastic and waste audit to keep the ecosystems clean, acting as local guides, bird watchers by giving them proper training and other required materials under the aegis of the Forest Department.

It is submitted that, the following preventive measures are being taken up by the Forest Department to control plastic and other garbage in the Vanjangi hills:

- 1) **Erection of Check post:** The Forest department has erected an entry check gate at the entrance of the Vanjangi hills to control public, Vehicle movement and plastic into the area.
- 2) **Cleaning of Eco tourism center:** villagers of Vanjangi VSS, Lagisapalli Village were engaged in collecting and disposing the plastic and other garbage at Eco-Tourism center for 2 months from January to February of 2022 (Tourist season) and wages were paid from the revenue collected at Check gate.

- a. Subsequently, the District Administration had taken over the management of the area in 2022 and transferred responsibility of the management to the Project

Officer, ITDA, Paderu. Since then the Management of Vanjangi hills is under the control of the Project Officer, ITDA, Paderu.

- b. The Project Officer, ITDA Paderu established a toll gate near Vanjangi village to control the movement of public and Vehicles and local villagers were engaged in collecting and disposing the plastic and other garbage at Eco-Tourism center regularly without having any ill effects on the fragile ecosystem.
- c. Movement of vehicles and public during night time is strictly prohibited in the area to prevent disturbance the wildlife movement.
- d. Placed the dust bins at various locations in the Vanjangi hills to collect plastic and other garbage.
- e. No permanent structures were constructed in the area retaining its original Character intact.

2. Araku Pinery Ecotourism initiative:

It is submitted that, Araku Pinery area is located in a revenue land (RS No. 89/1A of Anjoda Village, Korrayi Panchayat) which was handed over to the Forest department in 1964 to raise Pine and Eucalyptus plantation on experimental basis by the State Silviculturist, Rajahmundry. The area was planted with Pines & Eucalyptus trees in 1970-71.

It is submitted that, Before starting the Araku Pinery ETI, the locality was frequented by tourists who thronged the place for photography and videography for its scenic beauty. However, there were not even the basic tourist amenities. There was no security to the place, to the visitors, to the trees. The place was covered with weeds and jungle growth giving an unpleasant look without proper mechanism for regulating plastic use and disposal. The Tourists throw the plastic water bottles, heavily packed food stuffs, food parcels packaged drinks and other garbage very irresponsibly in the site. The area was infested with liquor bottles and broken liquor bottles



thrown by the vagabonds. Fire occurrences were not uncommon due to the resinous pine needles.



Under these circumstances, it was proposed to develop Araku Pinery Eco-tourism Initiative for conservation of Pine ecosystem by educating the tourists about responsible travel to natural areas and to generate revenue to improve the socio-economic life of tribal people.

The Forest Department has taken up various initiatives and preventive measures in eco-tourism centre to control the plastic pollution such as,

1. Declaring the entire area as plastic free zone.
2. Regularly conducting the cleaning drives duly involving local community.
3. Usage of semi permanent structures made up of eco-friendly material creating awareness on reduced plastic usage which are harmful to nature and for environment conservation.
4. Checking of the bags for plastic and other garbage material at the entry gate to control the plastic inside the park.
5. RO Drinking water is being provided in the park so as to discourage usage of Packaged drinking water to reduce plastic debris.

It is submitted that, Apart from the above activities, the Forest Department has taken up an initiative with the financial support of the District Collector, Alluri Sita Ramaraju District, Paderu "Cleaning of ghat roads" in the Paderu division. In the last two years, the Forest Department of Paderu division has taken up Cleaning drive along the Araku and Paderu ghat roads during tourist season spanning from November to February. It has collected the all the plastic waste duly engaging the local tribal people on daily wage basis and scientifically disposed with the support of District administration.



It is submitted that the District Collector has conducted consultative meetings with various stakeholders involving heads of the various departments, local public representatives and various NGOs to control and manage the plastic waste in this region.

It is submitted that this year also, the Forest Department is planning to take up steps to control the plastic waste at the entry points of the district boarder duly erecting check posts with the help of the District administration.

It is submitted that finally, the efforts to conserve the natural forest areas and other ecologically sensitive areas will be intensified duly involving the forest department, local communities, District administration, NGOs and other stakeholders with an emphasis on the reducing the plastic pollution and educating the visiting tourists on responsible tourism.

III. Initiatives taken up in Chintapalli Forest Division:

Various initiatives taken up to control Plastic pollution in Chintapalli Division are given below:

1. Plastic eradication activities:

It is submitted that the plastic wastage is being collected along the routes from Narsipatnam to Sileru and Chintapalli to Paderu roads every week and conducted awareness camps with the merchants/ vendors in the shandies and the shops.

It is submitted that the dust bins were placed at all the main points and temples, public gathering points and also on road side Reserve Forest areas. The wastage collecting items like sticks/iron rods, glows etc., are distributed to the collectors. The forest department staff and protection watchers have done exemplary work in eradication of plastic in Chintapalli Forest Division.





2. Fixing of awareness boards/hoardings:

It is submitted that, the Chintapalli forest division has succeeded in creating awareness among the masses by erecting the publicity hoardings, lighting boards and stopper boards with the assistance of external agencies (General Manager, Advertisement wing, CMR Visakhapatnam) worth of about Rs.20.00 lakh. All the boards were erected/ fixed at strategic locations identified by the field staff along the four main roads passing in Chintapalli Forest Division i.e., 1.Chintapalli to Sileru road, 2.Downoor to Chintapalli road, 3.K.D.Peta to Chintapalli road and 4.Chintapalli to G.Madugula road and the office premises. The details of boards are as follows:

S. Rao
 Chief Conservator of Forests
 Visakhapatnam Circle
 Visakhapatnam

Sl. no.	Board type	Size (feet)	No. of units
1	Publicity boards (double pole)	4x8	40
2	Publicity boards (land hoards)	20x10	5
3	Lighting boards	4x20	2
		4x8	1
		4x15	4
		4x10	1
4	Barricades (stopper boards)	4x12	2
		8x4	20
Total:			75





It is submitted that the rise in footfall in natural forest areas and ecologically sensitive areas although has serious implications but if these areas are managed in such a way that by establishing ecotourism centres, the ill effects can be negated to a great extent by proper management of those areas duly regulating the movement of public and their activities by continuous monitoring and supervision by the local people. The local people are also helpful in collecting the plastic and other wastage and educating the tourists about the importance of responsible travel to these fragile areas and create awareness about what to do and what not to do in these areas to conserve these sensitive ecosystems. Further this will in turn helps in improving the economy of local area and change the aptitude of the local people towards environment conservation.

IV. Nagarjun Sagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve.

Following is the detailed report on waste management in Nagarjun Sagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is submitted that the impact of temples and pilgrims in forested areas on the environment and local ecology can be significant. As pilgrim numbers increase, there is often a corresponding rise in waste generation, habitat disturbance, and resource consumption, which can disrupt wildlife habitats, soil quality, and water systems. Balancing spiritual practices with environmental conservation is crucial to mitigate these impacts and foster sustainable coexistence between human activities and the natural world.

With a view to address the impacts as stated above, we have come up with the following measures that need to be undertaken to mitigate there impact. The Action Plan is for a period of 3 years. With majority of the initiatives undertaken or initiated in the first year and any further alterations of developments to be made in subsequent years to better execute the objective. The Plan is divided into Three Themes.

THEME I: Plastic Free Srisailem, Nagarjun Sagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve and all the enclosures in NSTR.

THEME II: Religious Green Pilgrimage in Nagarjun Sagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve.

THEME III: Safeguards for Wildlife on Highways.

It is submitted that, sustainable management practices, such as waste management systems, eco-friendly infrastructure development, and controlled visitor access, are essential. Collaboration between religious authorities, conservation organizations, and local communities can help strike a balance between spiritual practices and environmental protection, ensuring the long-term health and preservation of forest ecosystems and wildlife.

It is submitted that, along with the above measures a strong Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaign shall be planned and implemented by Nagarjun Sagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve authorities and Srisailam Temple authorities and it is aimed to achieve 80% of the goals in the 1st year (2024-25), 90 % by 2nd year (2025-26) and 100 % by third year (2026-27).

1. INTRODUCTION

It is submitted that, the impact of temples and pilgrims in forested areas on the environment and local ecology can be significant. As pilgrim numbers increase, there is often a corresponding rise in waste generation, habitat disturbance, and resource consumption, which can disrupt wildlife habitats, soil quality, and water systems. Balancing spiritual practices with environmental conservation is crucial to mitigate these impacts and foster sustainable coexistence between human activities and the natural world.

The temples and pilgrim sites in forested areas attract large numbers of visitors, leading to various environmental impacts:

- i) **Habitat disturbance:** Increased human activity, such as foot traffic, construction, and clearing of vegetation for infrastructure, can disrupt natural habitats. This disturbance affects plant and animal species that rely on the forest ecosystem for survival.
- ii) **Waste generation:** The influx of pilgrims often results in a significant amount of waste, including plastic bottles, food wrappers, and other non-biodegradable materials. Improper disposal practices can lead to pollution of soil, water bodies, and the air, harming both terrestrial and aquatic life.
- iii) **Resource consumption:** Pilgrims require resources such as water, firewood, and food, which may strain local ecosystems. Overharvesting of resources can lead to depletion of natural resources and disrupt the balance of the ecosystem.
- iv) **Wildlife disturbance:** Increased human presence can disrupt the behavior and habits of wildlife, leading to stress, displacement, and even endangerment of certain species. Noise pollution from religious activities and development can also impact wildlife communication and breeding patterns.
- v) **Fire risk:** Rituals involving fire or the burning of incense can pose a fire hazard in forested areas, especially during dry seasons. Uncontrolled fires can lead to widespread damage to vegetation, wildlife habitats, and soil fertility.

It is submitted that, sustainable management practices, such as waste management systems, eco-friendly infrastructure development, and controlled visitor access, are essential. Collaboration between religious authorities, conservation organizations, and local communities can help strike a balance between spiritual practices and environmental protection, ensuring the long-term health and preservation of forest ecosystems and wildlife.

2. Proposed Mitigation Measures

It is submitted that, with a view to address the impacts as stated above, we have come up with the following measures that need to be undertaken to mitigate their impact. The Action Plan is for a period of 3 years. With majority of the initiatives undertaken or initiated in the first year and any further alterations of developments to be made in subsequent years to better execute the objective. The Plan is divided into Three themes. The themes are as detailed below:

2.1. THEME PLAN I:

Plastic Free Srisailam, NSTR and all the enclosures in NSTR:

It is submitted that, the waste generated by pilgrims in forest and temple areas can vary in type and quantity but often includes Plastic Waste, Plastic items, Organic Waste, Non-biodegradable offerings, construction debris and hazardous waste. But the most significant waste in terms of quantity and impact is the plastic waste generated. Plastic bottles, wrappers, bags, and other disposable items are commonly discarded by pilgrims. Since plastic takes hundreds of years to decompose, it can persist in the environment, posing a threat to wildlife through ingestion or entanglement.

It is submitted that, Managing the waste generated by pilgrims in forest and temple areas requires coordinated efforts, including waste segregation, recycling initiatives, and regular cleanup campaigns. Hence there is a need to completely stop plastic waste in these areas. Apart from banning, Education and awareness programs can also help promote responsible practices among pilgrims, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and conservation.



The various actions that need to be taken by different stakeholders:

A total of six (6) coordination meetings were conducted on regulating the use of plastic and declaring Nagarjunasagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve (NSTR) as plastic free zone and other common issues affecting the Forest Department and Srisailam Devasthanam. It was decided to ban the use of single use plastic inside the Tiger Reserve as per the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Various measures to ban the same and alternatives was discussed in the meeting and that which are proposed in the Action Plan are detailed below:

i) **Ban on single use of plastic:**

It is submitted that, A complete ban on single use plastic bottles and bags is to be imposed in the next three months of the first year of the plan. The ban shall be implemented by a joint team formed with Srisailam Devasthanam and Forest Department. The Srisailam Devasthanam shall completely switch over to Eco-friendly items such as Cloth, Jute and Paper Bags. The Srisailam Devasthanam shall also install/deploy Garbage collection bins at various points in consultation with Forest Department/NSTR.

(Action by: Srisailam Devasthanam Authorities, Forest Department & District Administration)

ii) **Check Post Screening:**

It is submitted that, All the vehicles carrying plastic bottles & bags are to be stopped at the check post at Lingalagattu, Dornala and all other check posts in NSTR. This will be done to avoid vehicles from entering into the Tiger Reserve with plastic and plastic items. and distributed in the temple.

(Action by: Forest Department)

iii) **Setting up RO plants:**

It is submitted that, As the ban on use of single use plastic is in force in NSTR, the pilgrims to be provided an alternative source of water. The temple authorities to provide adequate RO plants at all points of the temple premises and enroute Srisailam as well. The temple authorities to do a survey to identify existing locations of RO plants and come up with additional location that need to be covered. Apart from the temple premises RO facility to be provided at Shikharam, Hatakeshwaram, Pathala ganga and other important locations.

(Action by: Srisailam Devasthanam Authorities)

iv) **Awareness campaign:**

It is submitted that, Vehicle to be deployed to spread awareness about banning of single use plastic. Announcement in villages and temple premises to be made. The message on ban to be given on the Speaker, Srisailam TV, Srisailamprabha magazine and website. The ban on plastic is to be printed on the tickets as well.

(Action by: Srisailam Devasthanam Authorities & Forest Department)

v) **Alternative to Plastic:**

It is submitted that, the best and the most cost effective alternatives to single use plastic is to be provided to pilgrims. Alternatively reusable water bottles can be made available at temple premises. Usage of cloth, Jute and Paper bags sewn by local women's cooperatives, glass bottles and other eco-friendly Re-usable bottles need to be explored. A detailed strategy for the same is to be formulated.

(Action by: Srisailam Devasthanam Authorities & Forest Department)

vi) **Joint Vigilance Enforcement Team (JVET):**

It is submitted that, Joint Vigilance & Enforcement Team has been formed to enforce the ban on plastic. The team comprising of Devasthanam representatives and Forest Department. The role of the team is to enforce the ban on use of plastic and also inspect satrams and stop them from disposing food openly.

(Action by: Srisailam Temple Authorities and Forest Department)

vii) **Deployment of Swachh sevaks:**

It is submitted that, As the temple is an enclosure inside the Tiger Reserve (NSTR) and the pilgrim pass through the Tiger Reserve to visit the Srisailam Devasthanam, it becomes the joint responsibility of the Srisailam Devasthanam authority and Forest Department (NSTR) to keep the area free of plastic. NSTR has engaged 125 No. Swachh sevaks to collect the plastic and garbage on all the roads passing through NSTR and also on roads leading to Srisailam. The Srisailam Devasthanam has been requested to provide 50 No. Swachh sevak to Forest Department/NSTR. The Srisailam Devasthanam shall also install customized Garbage collection bins at various points in consultation with Forest Department/NSTR.

(Action by: Srisailam Devasthanam Authorities and Forest Department/NSTR)

viii) **Dump yard:**

It is submitted that, the work with respect to removal of existing dump yard in Srisailam has not yet started. More the 200 Metric Tonne (MT) of Plastic and other non-decomposable solid waste is dumped unscientifically inside the Tiger Reserve/Sanctuary. The dump is posing serious problem and resulting in Human-Wildlife conflict. The Srisailam Devasthanam authorities has been requested to phased out/remove the entire dump by July 2024 and the dump yard shall be reclaimed/restored with plantations and alternatively proper solid waste management facility shall be developed as per the guidelines of Pollution Control Board so as to mitigate the Human-Wildlife Conflicts effectively and making the Srisailam, NSTR and enclosures Plastic Free.

(Action by: Srisailam Temple Authorities)

ix) **Penalty/Fine:**

It is submitted that, A fine to be imposed if anyone is seen selling or using plastic bottles or covers in the tiger reserve. An action plan and the amount of fine to be agreed upon after discussion with the concerned stakeholders and after giving adequate warnings and notices.

Action by: Srisailam Temple Authorities, Forest Department & Other stakeholders

x) **Other Initiatives:**

It is submitted that, Any others steps/initiatives as deemed fit to reduce the use of plastic in the tiger reserve and temple premises to be discussed and implemented. The above steps are only indicative and to ensure proper and quick implementation of the ban, modification and added maybe made based on the ground situation and effectiveness of the same.

2.2. THEME PLAN II:

Religious Green Pilgrimage in NSTR:

It is submitted that, Numerous places of worship/pilgrim places such as Bramaramba Sri Mallikarjuna Temple, Srisaillam, Istakameswari Temple, Rudracode Temple, Gundla Bramheswara Temple and many more Temples exist in the Nagarjunasagar Srisaillam Tiger Reserve (NSTR), holding significance for local communities. There huge influx of Pilgrims in Core area of Tiger Reserve during Shivarari and Ugadi Festivals. It is estimated that, more than Four (4) lakh pilgrims during Shivaratri and Six (6) lakh pilgrims during Ugadi Festivals use the foot path of about 40 kms distance which is passing through the Core area of Tiger Reserve during February, March and April months every year. Consequently, this is causing irreparable and lasting impact on the Wildlife habitat and biodiversity in Nagarjunasagar Srisaillam Tiger Reserve. Pilgrims throw large quantity of plastic waste, garbage, solid waste, chappals/slippers etc., attending nature calls, bathing in natural water bodies the Core area, which is resulting in pollution of water bodies. It becomes extremely difficult for the Tiger Reserve authorities to control the huge influx of pilgrims during the festival season. Balancing the needs of religious sites and tiger conservation is challenging but essential. While the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) acknowledges the need to manage religious tourism.



2.2.1. Guidelines to reduce the impact in Tiger Reserve:

It is submitted that, Bridging the gap between religious practices and conservation efforts is essential for sustainable religious tourism. The management of Religious Green Pilgrimage in Tiger Reserve necessitates an overarching framework that emphasizes collaboration, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. At its core, this framework relies on close cooperation between Tiger Reserve authorities, religious institutions, conservation organizations, and local communities. By working together, stakeholders can effectively address the complex challenges posed by religious pilgrimages while safeguarding the natural environment. Sustainable practices are paramount in this endeavour, as they help minimize the environmental impact of pilgrim activities on fragile ecosystems within tiger reserves. Through proactive measures and responsible management, the framework aims to strike a balance between religious traditions and conservation priorities, ensuring the long-term viability of Wildlife & its habitat, biodiversity and cultural heritage.

2.2.2. The impact of Religious Pilgrimage Tourism in Tiger Reserve:

1. **Waste and Sanitation:** High levels of open defecation, plastic, and other litter (often consumed by wildlife), Non-biodegradable and Solid waste dump creation.
2. **Water Pollution:** Pollution of natural Water bodies, streams, springs and other water harvesting structures. Dangerous and increasing levels of E coli in streams/river water with downstream Indigenous communities reporting dysentery, skin rashes, and food poisoning for months after the festival.
3. **Disturbance to Wildlife & its habitat:** Noise, lights, traffic, large crowds camping and walking through Core area of Tiger Reserve and biodiversity rich areas. Immense disturbance to Wildlife, its habitat and biodiversity.
4. **Forest Fires:** During festival season of Shivaratri and Ugadi from February to April every year, the Tiger Reserve experiences large number of man made Forest fires mostly in Pilgrimage foot path/route. The fires eventually spread to other parts of Tiger Reserve. Many a times it becomes extremely uncontrollable.
5. **Damage to surrounding Flora and Fauna from camping:** Due to camping of pilgrims inside the Tiger Reserve, there is a great degree of damage noticed to surrounding Flora and Fauna in the Tiger Reserve.

2.2.3. The Green Pilgrimage Model:

1. It is submitted that, During the festival season of Shivarathri and Ugadi there is an average footfall of approximately 50-60 thousand pilgrims in a day over a period of 10 days for each of the festivals, who use the forest route to reach the temple. Given that both the festivals coincide with the peak summer/fire season, where forest resource are already very scarce, this causes a significant impact to the forest and wildlife. Hence, there is a need to regulate and control the number of people who enter the forest. As a step to ensure this, it is proposed to put a cap on the number of people who enter the tiger reserve in a day. Therefore, it is proposed to restrict the number to 8-10 thousand people in a day. As an initiative to reduce the impact of pilgrimage, we propose to introduce Green Cess (GC)/Environmental maintenance charges (EMC). The EMC charges collected would go towards restoring the natural habitat in order to maintain its ecological value. Initiatives like waste/plastic cleanup through employing local tribals as swatch sevaks, fire watchers, protection watchers and other such steps to restore the habitat.
2. It is submitted that, open defecation by pilgrims at the natural water bodies in the tiger reserve has caused contamination of water and the impact of which are noticed throughout the year. There is an urgent need to protect these scarce resource particularly during summer. As a step to reduce the impact of this, we suggest to explore alternatives to using natural water bodies for all human needs.
3. It is submitted that, impact of human pressure has lasting effects throughout the year, hence there is a great need to restrict human/pilgrims movement inside the tiger reserve only during the festivals of Shivaratri and Ugadi. The pilgrims shall be permitted to use the existing pilgrim path from Venkatapuram to Kailasha Dwaram via Pecharuvu for a period of 7 days before Shivaratri and Ugadi. Barring these two festivals, general public, pilgrims, vehicles or any other activities shall not be permitted.

4. It is submitted that, Research the dynamics of religious tourism in tiger reserve and impacts and threats to biodiversity.
5. It is submitted that, Make recommendations for improved management of the Tiger Reserve before, during, and after pilgrimages.
6. It is submitted that, Support the establishment of multi-stakeholder committees to develop and launch co-management plans for a more conservation friendly pilgrimage.
7. It is submitted that, Launch awareness campaigns before and during pilgrimages that includes faith based conservation messages.

2.2.4. Plastic waste management during Mahashivarathri and Ugadi

1. It is submitted that, At the entry points of pilgrimage routes, the plastic water bottles shall be replaced by steel bottles on subsidized cost. The funding may be raised by temple authorities.
2. It is submitted that, Sufficient temporary (Semi permanent) water supply points may be established at all feasible locations in the forest routes, where purified water can be supplied, at the cost of Srisailam Temple Authorities.
3. It is submitted that, A lot of vendors (mainly tribal and other backward communities) sell various food products packed in plastics inside and outside the forest areas at the entry points. Here appropriate measure has to be taken to collect the plastic by replacing with biodegradable paper covers, cloth bags, Jute bags etc., (NSTR and Srisailam Devasthanam jointly shall promote eco-friendly bags manufacturing to the Chenchus and other local communities).
4. It is submitted that, Permanent and Semi permanent garbage collection waste collection points (Dustbins) shall be placed and collected on daily basis and disposed outside the sanctuary. For collection, Degradation & Transportation, Dustbins, Man power & vehicles are required.
5. It is submitted that, the Government may address the neighboring states Karnataka and Maharashtra about the measures taken and for cooperation and coordination and wide publicity may be given in these states through print and electronic media.

2.2.5. Role of different stakeholders:

a) Role of Forest Department:

- Ensure protection of forest and wildlife
- Control/prevent Forest fires along the pilgrim walking path
- Enforcing the ban imposed on plastic and other anthropogenic impacts.
- Collection of the proposed EMC/Green Cess
- Coordination with the Srisailam Temple Authorities, Police Department and Fire Service.
- Prior written approval of Deputy Director, PT, Atmakur shall be obtained before setting up Annadanam or other pilgrim facilities by NGO's, Individuals or any other body of Individuals. All the conditions imposed by Deputy Director shall be adhered to strictly and deviation in this regard will be dealt as per the conditions stated in the agreement. These Pilgrim facilities shall be permitted only after conducting proper carrying capacity of the area and facilities to be permitted to bare minimum.

- A Refundable Security Deposit of Rs. 50,000/- (which may be subjected to increase as per the conditions) shall be collected from each of the participating bodies. In addition to the refundable security deposit a one time Environmental Maintenance Charges (EMC) of Rs. 20,000/- shall be collected from the NGO's, Individuals or any other body of Individuals who intend to set up pilgrim facilities.

b) Role of Srisailam Temple Authorities:

- To provide manpower (Swatch Sevaks, Fire watchers and Protection Watchers) to the Forest Department (NSTR) during festival season of Shivarathri and Ugadi to ensure the forest is free of plastic or any other solid waste created by the pilgrims visiting Srisailam Temple. Given the scale of impact by pilgrims, man power of 100-120 people shall be required to mitigate the impact.
- Special attention to be given to the foot wear discarded by pilgrims at Bimuni Kolanu, where four to five (4-5) truckloads of footwear and other plastic waste are recklessly thrown on either side of Bimuni Kolanu. It is a great logistical challenge to clear this waste. A possible engineering solution would be to set up a ropeway on either side of Bimuni Kolanu to clean up this dump. Temple authority to actively coordinate with NSTR in this regard.
- It shall be the role of Srisailam Temple Authority to ensure that sufficient waste disposal bins are provided at every 500 meter along the pilgrim walking path.
- Coordinate with forest department for making food and other amenities for the walking pilgrims.
- Water tankers to be arranged by temple authorities to meet the requirements of the pilgrims.



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Chief Conservator of Forests
Visakhapatnam Circle
Visakhapatnam

Chappals, Slippers thrown along the Pilgrim route



- RO water facility to also be provided by the temple authorities.
- Any other steps necessary to ensure sanctity of the Tiger Reserve is maintained to be taken up.

c) Role of other Departments/stakeholder:

- District Administration to actively engage with the NSTR authorities and provide all the necessary logistic and administrative support.
- Police Department to support the Forest Department in managing people, regulate traffic and maintain law and order.
- Fire Service to be on stand by and help in the instance of uncontrolled fire outbreak in the tiger reserve.

2.2.6. Conclusion:

The "Green Pilgrimage" Model has great potential for application to NSTR. There is a critical need for integrating Responsible and Green religious pilgrimage with Wildlife conservation efforts in Tiger Reserve and there is a necessity of ecological studies to assess potential impacts on Wildlife and habitats. It essentially required for establishment of multi-stakeholder committees, development of action plans based on research studies and stakeholder input etc., Further, it is important to understand the challenges associated with managing Religious Green Pilgrimage in Tiger Reserves, such as balancing religious and conservation priorities and managing visitor numbers and its impact on the Wildlife and Biodiversity.

2.3. THEME PLAN III:

Safeguards for Wildlife on Highways:

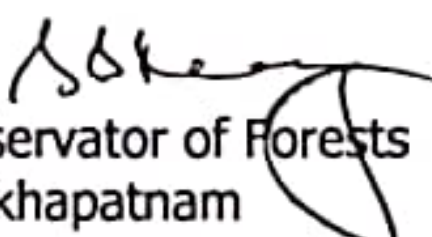
It is submitted that, thousands of vehicles ply everyday between Kurnool – Guntur Road, Dornala – Srisailam Road and Hyderabad–Srisailam Road, especially during Mahasivarathri and Ugadi festivals. There are no night time traffic restrictions in the Kurnool–Guntur Road, there is incidents of many wild animals such as Leopard, Sambar, Spotted Deer, Jackal, Civet Cat etc., being run over by fast moving vehicles. Therefore, there is a need to regulate vehicular traffic during night time. Although the vehicular traffic during night time is closed in Dornala–Srisailam Road but during festival season of Mahashivaratri & Ugadi, the vehicular traffic permitted temporarily in Dornala–Srisailam Road during night time.

Vehicular traffic on highway passing through the Tiger reserve shall be regulated. No vehicles are allowed through the tiger reserve between 9 PM to 6 AM on Dornala- Srisaillam highway. Similar to this, night traffic on the Kurnool-Guntur Road (NH 340C) from Bairluttu to Dornala should also be curtailed during night hours. The impact of vehicular movement on this road is very evident, with frequent road kills of wildlife, some of which are shown below:



In view of the above circumstances, it is therefore prayed that this Hon'ble Tribunal may be consider this report and pass orders in the OA No.152 of 2024(SZ) and thus render justice.

Dated:16-09-2024


Chief Conservator of Forests
Visakhapatnam


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