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2024-25

Department of Wildlife Protection
Office of the Wildlife Warden, Central Division Srinagar
New Theed Harwan, Dachigam Pin-191123

Email: wlwc786@gmail.com

The Consultant Judicial
Hon'ble National Green Tribunal (P.B)
New Delhi.

No: WLWC/Estt/2024-25/1384-87
Dt: 09-11-2024.

Subject: News item appearing in India.com dated 27.07.2024 titled "Saving Kashmir Brown Bears is a Race Against Time - Wildlife SOS and J & K Wildlife Protection Dept. take challenge"

Reference: Original application No: 1046/2024 and Notice served on 22.08.2024.


Sir

In compliance to the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal Order dated August 05, 2024 in the matter titled News item appearing in India.com dated 27.07.2024 titled "Saving Kashmir Brown Bears is a Race Against Time - Wildlife SOS and J&K Wildlife Protection Department take challenge" kindly find enclosed herewith the copy of the report w.r.t Department of Wildlife Protection, J&K Government (Respondent No 2).

The factual report may kindly be taken on record and placed before the Hon'ble NGT (PB) for consideration please.


Encl: (As above)

Yours faithfully,


Parvez Ahmad Wani, DCF
Wildlife Warden
Central Division Srinagar

Copy to the:

1. Pr. Chief Conservator of Forests (WL)/Chief Wildlife Warden J&K.
2. Sh. G.M. Kawoosa, Additional Standing Counsel for J&K Govt. in the Hon'ble NGT matters in New Delhi for information and necessary action.
3. Regional Wildlife Warden Kashmir.


Parvez Ahmad Wani, DCF
Wildlife Warden
Central Division Srinagar

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BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI

Original Application No. 1046/2024

News item appearing in India.com dated 27.07.2024 titled "Saving Kashmir Brown Bears is a Race Against Time - Wildlife SOS and J & K Wildlife Protection Dept. take challenge"

Order Dated: August 05, 2024

This report is submitted in compliance to the above Order of the Hon'ble NGT in the matter by the Department of Wildlife Protection J&K Government on behalf of the respondent No: (2). This OA is registered *suo motu* on the basis of the news item titled "**Saving Kashmir Brown Bears is a Race Against Time - Wildlife SOS and J & K Wildlife Protection Dept. take challenge**".

That, as per the article, Wildlife SOS has initiated a research project for identifying factors leading to human-Himalayan Brown Bear conflict in Sonamarg area of Kashmir.

That, in the Indian Himalayan regions, the brown bear is mostly distributed in the high-altitude ranges of Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh UT, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The animal is poorly studied due to its elusive nature and its occurrence in rugged landscape.

That, in order to have a science-based insight regarding the movement patterns of Brown Bears in Sonamarg Landscape, Kashmir, the Department of Wildlife Protection J&K vide No: WLP/Res/F-101/21-22/128-30 Dt: 22-04-2021 accorded permission in favour of Wildlife SOS for "Setting up of Face Detection Camera Traps to be installed in Sonamarg Landscape".

That, in continuance, Department of Wildlife Protection J&K also accorded permission in favour of Wildlife SoS vide No: WLP/Res/F-101/2022-2023/253-55 Dt: 25-08-2022 for radio collaring of 10 Brown Bears (5 males and 5 females) aimed to assess the population and distribution of Brown Bears and also to understand the Brown Bear habitat utilization and movement patterns.

That, Wildlife SoS has submitted a preliminary report titled as "Report on Radio-Collaring of Himalayan Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos isabellinus*) in


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Sonamarg, Central Wildlife Division, Kashmir. The report mentions that the home range of Brown Bears recorded during the study period ranges between 77.7 Sq.Km to 1002 Sq.Kms indicating that these animals are distributed at a landscape level over a very large area.

That, Wildlife SoS has conducted a survey in the area using camera traps as well as by interviewing cross section of people like herders, hoteliers, civil society, and other stake holders. The density of brown bears has also been assessed by the Wildlife SOS team using the camera trapping method. Feeding behaviour and seasonal changes in the diet have also been studied based on scat analysis.

That, in the news item titled "Saving Kashmir Brown Bears is a Race Against Time-Wildlife SOS and J & K Wildlife Protection Dept. take challenge", the issue of unplanned disposal and treatment of waste in Kashmir's Sonamarg Region has been highlighted as a major concern.

That, in order to address the above concern, the Department of Wildlife Protection vide communications No. WLWC/Estt/2022-23/2392-96 dated: 23-12-2022, No: ROG/WL/Sindh/51-55 dated: 13-05-2023, No: WLWC/Estt/2024-25/793-96 dated: 31-07-2024 and No: WLWC/Estt/2024-25/1028-31 dated: 10-09-2024 took up the matter regarding improper management of solid and kitchen waste with the deputy Commissioner District Ganderbal and Chief Executive Officer, Sonamarg Development Authority who vide No.EE/SDA/2022/804-08 dated: 28-12-2022 has reported as under:

"That, the Solid Waste received from various areas of Sonamarg is dumped in the premises of the Solid Waste Management Plant at Sarbal which is completely fenced. The Solid Waste received at the Plant is then scientifically treated in the various machines installed for the purpose. The work is done on fast-track basis and no waste is kept outside i.e in the premises of the Plant by the concerned staff and thus there is no scope or possibility of attracting the Wild animals in general and the Brown Bear in particular as indicted in the letter. The Sonamarg Development Authority takes every care in tackling the issue of disposal of the Solid Waste received from various areas of Sonamarg on scientific basis and the technical personal have been posted at the Plant for the purpose who work 24x7 so that the Solid Waste received at the Plant is segregated and disposed of in the scientific manner and also to avoid any leftovers in the premises of the Plant at Sarbal".

That, latest status regarding the action taken for scientific management of solid and kitchen waste from Chief Executive Officer, Sonamarg Development Authority remains awaited.


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That, the Department of Wildlife Protection J&K in collaboration with Wildlife SoS has launched a comprehensive awareness drive in the tourist zone of Sonamarg regarding disposal of kitchen waste and solid waste generated at these sites.

That, the claim in the news item that "in a study by Wildlife SoS in 2021, 75 % of the diet of bears was human made garbage dumps including plastic, chocolates and organic food wastes" is based on a very small data base in terms of its spatial and temporal distribution. The area concerned in the study with respect to the observed changes in the food habit of Brown Bears near Sonamarg is very small and is insignificant compared to the large home range used by these animals. Therefore, observation in the study in respect of food habit of Brown Bears in Sonamarg area based on the limited scat analysis can be treated as inconsequential.

That, Department of Wildlife Protection J&K has already notified Thajwas Wildlife Sanctuary (covering a part of Sonamarg area) which is spread over 210 sq.kms. The Department has also been able to get its Eco-Sensitive Zone notified recently by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, aiming to give protection to the rich biodiversity of the sanctuary. The sanctuary hosts a variety of rare and endangered wildlife species such as Snow Leopard, Brown Bear, Black Bear, Himalayan Wolf, Ibex and Musk Deer. The management of this sanctuary is being done strictly in accordance with the approved Management Action Plan.

That, there is no development project presently under execution within the notified limits of Thajwas Wildlife Sanctuary. Also, no rail link has been constructed in or around Thajwas Wildlife Sanctuary. Further, no incident of Himalayan Brown Bear poaching has been reported so far in the area.

That, no adverse finding with respect to habitat of Brown Bear in Sonamarg area has yet been made. However, improved management of solid waste and kitchen waste generated in the tourist zone would be helpful in preventing Brown Bear from eating food waste.

Hence the report is submitted.


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