

Wildlife board meeting raises concerns on ecotourism in forests

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The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) deferred its decision to implement guidelines on ecotourism in forest and wildlife areas and to rationalise boundaries of protected areas at its meeting held in March after its members raised concerns about them and said this should not be done without field studies, according to minutes of the meet published last week.

The guidelines were formulated earlier this year and were expected to be implemented in April. Several independent experts have criticised the idea of opening up and fragmenting forests for eco-tourism projects. They highlighted that existing eco-tourism facilities were adding a lot of anthropogenic pressure on protected areas.

The guidelines seek to promote low-impact nature tourism, traditional ecological knowledge, and heritage values of India's wilderness. They entail engagement with local communities in nature tourism, partnerships among stakeholders, and enhancing the potential of India as a global eco-tourism destination.

The rationalisation of boundaries of protected forests and wildlife sanctuaries or their de-notification was discussed during the NBWL meeting on March 30.

Former forester and NBWL member HS Singh objected to the policy and recommended that de-notification of boundaries of protected areas should be done for the conservation of wildlife. He added consolidation of boundaries should not be done without field investigation of a committee headed by an NBWL member.