

Development projects pose threat to habitats

In a grim reminder of the threats that India's tigers face, a report released on July 23 lists 399 road, irrigation and railway projects that could impact tiger habitats in eight States comprising the Central India-Eastern Ghats landscape.

The report, prepared by the not-for-profit Wildlife Conservation Trust which works with the government on wildlife and forest conservation, banked on information on 1,697 linear development projects that require the diversion of 57,071 hectares of forest land.

These projects, proposed in central India and the Eastern Ghats, have been listed on the website of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change since July 2014.

Researchers who analysed this information found that 399 of these projects — estimated at Rs. 1,30,000 crores — will pass through potential tiger corridors in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan.

'Win-win solution'

Irrigation projects that will cut tiger territory include the Ken-Betwa link project in Madhya Pradesh, while road development proposals include the Nakerrekal to Mallampally portion of NH-365 in Telangana. For a majority of these projects (345), agencies that implement the work on ground have denied the requirement of wildlife clearances; and since more than 80% of these projects are still in various stages of clearances, there is "an opportunity to suggest corrective measures and incorporate mitigation structures so as to achieve a win-win solution for both development and wildlife," the report adds. However, ground realities are different, said wildlife biologist Imran Siddiqui, who studies tigers in Telangana.

"Many projects listed from Andhra and Telangana are in various stages of completion," he said. "There is no body to make sure projects comply with the conditions laid down by statutory bodies."

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