

# OVER 6,000 TREES ILLEGALLY CUT FOR TIGER SAFARI PROJECT IN CORBETT RESERVE, SAYS FSI REPORT

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Destroying environment:Trees being felled for the Pakhru Tiger Safari in the Jim Corbett National Park.Special Arrangement

The much-awaited tiger safari project of the Uttarakhand government is under scanner after a Forest Survey of India (FSI) report stated that over 6,000 trees were illegally cut in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) against the permission for 163 for the Pakhru Tiger Safari. The State Forest Department, however, denied the FSI's claims, and said that there were some technical issues which needed to be resolved before finally accepting the report.

The FSI was asked by the Uttarakhand Forest Department to access the status of illegal felling in and around the Pakhru Tiger Safari. They were asked to estimate the number of trees felled in the illegally cleared area based on expertise and technology available with the organisation. The Forest Survey Institute was also tasked to scan the area in and around the Pakhru Tiger Safari for illegal felling and to analyse any area within the Kalagarh Tiger Reserve, which was seen to be exhibiting forest cover change.

“After compiling the report in around nine months in Pakhru block, Kalushaheed block, Nalkhatta Block and Kalagarh block, the FSI has come up with an observation that the area cleared under the CTR is estimated as 16.21 hectares. The trees estimated on the cleared area are 6,093 in number with the lower bound of 5,765 and the upper bound of 6,421 with 95% confidence interval and 2.72% standard error,” said a senior official from the department.

Talking to *The Hindu*, Vinod Singhal, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Head of the Forest Force, accepted that the FSI found that 6,421 trees were illegally cut. He said the report has not been accepted so far. “After a preliminary examination of this report, there are several technical issues which needs to be resolved before this report to be accepted. There are several serious and important questions on the tabulation of the number of trees allegedly felled and the sampling technique used to arrive at this number,” added Mr. Singhal.

He confirmed that the department had the permission to cut 163 trees in the safari area, and in the primary investigation, it was found that 97 extra trees were illegally cut.

The matter of thousands of trees being felled illegally was highlighted by Gaurav Bansal, an environment-activist and lawyer based in Delhi.

Anoop Singh, Director-General, FSI, could not be contacted even after repeated attempts. Prakash Lakhchaura, Deputy DG, FSI, said that he cannot comment on the reservations of the Forest Department on FSI report as he is not aware of the matter.

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