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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Punjab Forest Dept proposes increase in Sukhna eco zone

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In a withdrawal from its stand of demarcating 100 metres as eco sensitive zone (ESZ) around the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary on the Punjab side, the Punjab Forest Department has come up with a fresh draft for increasing the demarcated area. The draft will be submitted to the Cabinet for approval, before being sent to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

A senior government functionary said an increase in the ESZ area has been proposed after consultation with stakeholders. Earlier, the Union Forest Ministry had rejected the Punjab Government's proposal of only 100 metres of ESZ around the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary after the Chandigarh Administration objected to it.

Recently, the Union Ministry had issued a draft notification demarcating area from 1 km to 2.035 km around the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary as ESZ on the Haryana side in Panchkula district. Though the UT Forest and Wildlife Department has declared from 2 km to 2.75 km area as ESZ of the sanctuary, it has been seeking a similar zone from Haryana and Punjab.

After Haryana's move to increase the demarcated area of the zone was approved by the Union Ministry, Punjab has also increased the demarcated area and would be seeking approval of the Union Ministry. Officials said 90 per cent of the sanctuary area fell in Haryana and Punjab.

The Supreme Court in its June 2022 order had ruled that each national park and wildlife sanctuary must have an ESZ of minimum 1 km, measured from the demarcated boundary of such protected forest.

The Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary is home to seven Schedule I animal species under the Wildlife Act, including leopard, Indian pangolin, sambar, golden jackal, king cobra, python and monitor lizard. The Schedule I species are considered endangered and need protection.

A few years ago, the issue of declaring an ESZ around Sukhna Lake had become a bone of contention between Punjab and UT. Punjab wanted to have just 100 metres of ESZ as it would pave the way for controversial Rs 1,800 crore multi-storey Tata Camelot project in Kansal (Punjab), which was to come up near the sanctuary. In 2019, the project was struck down by the Supreme Court citing interests of then 95 MLAs of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, who were to get flats in the project.

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Source:<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/chandigarh/punjab-forest-dept-proposes-increase-in-sukhna-eco-zone-638689#>