



Allocation to forest and wildlife sector not satisfactory: Experts

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Nagpur: Even as forest and wildlife is the harbinger to fight climate change, the central government has failed to do justice to the crucial ministry by allocating a meager Rs 3,030 crore in 2022-23. Though the allocation is 20% more than last fiscal's Rs 2,915 crore, experts say it matches close to the culture ministry which got an allocation of Rs 3,009 crore and is even less than the law and justice ministry got over Rs 3,393 crore.

HOW THE ALLOCATION GOES (₹ in crores)				
460 Pollution control	300 National Afforestation Programme (NAP)	35 Project Elephant	195 National Coastal Mission	78.62 Environment capacity building
361.69 National Mission for Green India	300 Project Tiger	10 Central Zoo Authority	58 Environmental education	

In the wildlife sector, the government-initiated schemes like 'Project Tiger' and 'Project Elephant' saw an increased allocation this year with Rs 50 crore to tiger reserves and Rs 2 crore for elephants. The allocation for NTCA though has increased from Rs 250 crore to Rs 300 crore this time, Project Tiger had seen cut of Rs 100 crore in two consecutive years 2020-21 and 2021-22.

"Even as human-elephant interactions have increased in the country, the budget for Project Elephant, which was launched to conserve elephants, the hike from Rs 33 crore to Rs 35 crore is unsatisfactory," said Kishor Rithe, member, Maharashtra State Wildlife Board.

"Most of the increase in allocation is due to a hike in wages and DA. With the present hike, there will be negligible effective afforestation. It is an irony that that water resources and river development and rejuvenation department has been allocated over Rs 18,967 crore but our forest and wildlife which holds these ecosystems get meager allocations," said wildlife conservationist Prafulla Bhamburkar.

It is good that the Centre has increased budgetary allocation for National Mission for Himalayan Studies by Rs 8 crore and the amount for various regional offices and statutory institutes like Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Forest Survey of India (FSI), Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), National Green Tribunal (NGT) collectively from Rs 460 crore in 2021-22 to Rs 487 crore this year.

Besides, the total allocation of five autonomous bodies under the environment ministry has also been reduced this year. The five autonomous bodies - GB Pant Himalayan Institute of Environment and Development, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Indian Plywood Industries Research and Training Institute (IPIRTI), and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) - were allocated Rs 287.45 crore compared to Rs 305.50 crore during the last fiscal. "The curbed budget will affect research projects," they said.

The budget for statutory and regulatory bodies was also cut down from Rs 160.5 crore last year to 154.5 crores this fiscal. These bodies include the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Animal Welfare Board (AWB), National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), and Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).

Rithe said, "It is good to see this time the FM has not curtailed budget of wildlife sector. However, the increase of merely Rs 50 crore compared to last fiscal is nothing as we had lost a total of 100 crore allocation in the last two fiscals. For elephant conservation also increase of merely Rs 2 crore is not enough."

"The total allocation of five autonomous bodies under the environment ministry has also been reduced this year along with the budget for statutory and regulatory bodies like CZA, NTCA, NBA, and AWB. The budget on environment education has also been reduced, which is unjustified," said Rithe.

"Under climate change actions by curbing carbon emissions, though intentions seem good, the strategy proposed is wrong like promoting biomass pellet burning in thermal power plants. There are better biomass recycling methods available," he said.

Wildlife biologist Imran Siddiqui said, "Environmental clearances to be put under one window system is a dangerous move that is supporting polluters for quick clearances or bypassing the existing safeguards. This is the anti-thesis for climate consciousness that the budget speech was loaded with. There have been ongoing ordinances or amendments to streamline green clearances. This will definitely remove safeguards and convert natural habitats much efficiently and faster."

HOW THE ALLOCATION GOES

* Pollution control: Rs 460

National Mission for Green India: Rs 361.69

* National Afforestation Programme (NAP): Rs 300

* Project Tiger: Rs 300

* Project Elephant: Rs 35

* Central Zoo Authority: Rs 10

* National Coastal Mission: Rs 195

* Environment capacity building: Rs 78.62.

* Environmental education: Rs 58.

(Rs in crores)

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