

COVID-19 hits Karnataka forest protectors, conservation may suffer

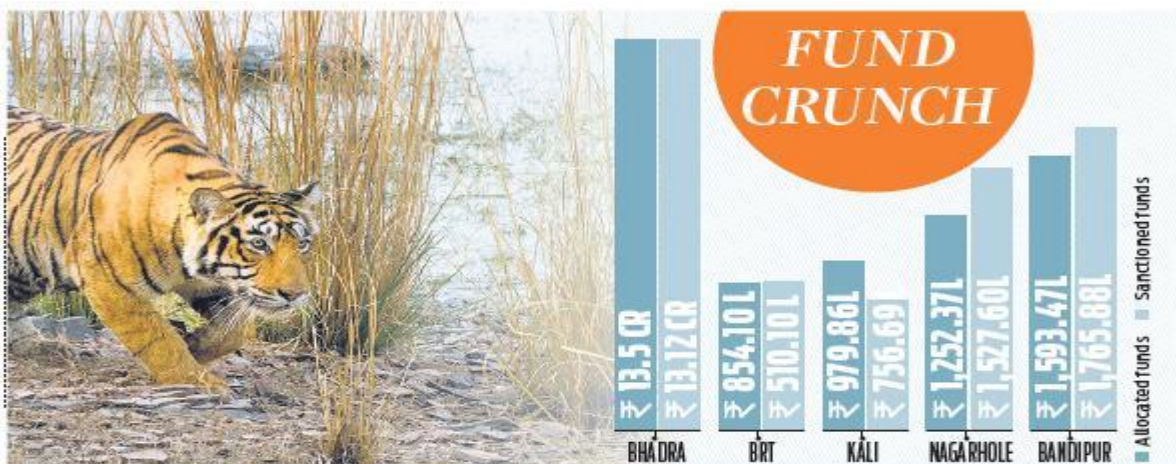
03 August 2020

Covid-19 has taken a toll on jobs across sectors, and those working to protect our forests are feeling the heat too.



BENGALURU: Covid-19 has taken a toll on jobs across sectors, and those working to protect our forests are feeling the heat too. The delay in release of funds from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), state and central governments has impacted wildlife protection across the state, and more so in tiger reserves. The NTCA has not released funds for those working in anti-poaching camps, putting pressure on the state forest department to lay off people.

“While sufficient money has been allocated to Nagarhole and Bandipur reserves, there have been cuts at BRT, Kali, and Bhadra reserves. Funding has drastically reduced, and we have brought this up at the regional and head office of the NTCA. We have requested that agreed-upon wages be released first, and then funds for other works,” said Ajai Mishra, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife.



He said that though there are funds available under Project Tiger, the amount is being kept for emergencies, and that they may be forced to use it. Citing the example of BRT reserve, Mishra said there are 104 anti-poaching watchers, but the NTCA has only sanctioned funds to pay 48 of them. Ideally, each anti-poaching camp has four watchers, but going by the funds released, only one can be stationed at each camp.

Sanjai Mohan, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, added for the last four years, the Centre has been releasing funds late - money that should be released in March, only comes through by August. "Anti-poaching camps are crucial. They are the backbone of conservation, and they have been hit the worst. When the pandemic hit, the state and Centre listed the services of the forest department as essential - this means wages should not be cut. what's happening on ground is very different from the reality," a senior forest department told TNIE.

Source:<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2020/aug/03/covid-19-hits-karnataka-forest-protectors-conservation-may-suffer-2178330.html>