

Centre may allow private funding for wildlife conservation

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The Centre may soon allow private and corporate funding for India's wildlife conservation efforts by forming a national-level public trust, officials aware of the matter said.

The proposal for this was floated at the last meeting of the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) held in late September.

"The budget available for the management of protected areas is insufficient. Hence, the proposal was floated... to mobilise funds from other sources. Even though it is still at a nascent stage, but we are moving in that direction," said a Union environment and forest ministry official, requesting anonymity.

Officials said the Centre would soon invite suggestions and opinions from forest officials across the country, including chief wildlife wardens of states, conservationists, experts and NGOs. A committee would be formed to study the suggestions before giving shape to the foundation.

Experts have welcomed the proposal. "This is a very good idea, but the government has to ensure that the corporate sector does not have a disproportionate say in the decision-making process," said Raman Sukumar, an ecologist, who attended the meeting.

H S Singh, an NBWL member, said he suggested in the meeting that such a foundation should be formed at the state and not at the national level. "The first idea is to involve every section of the society-- be it an individual, an NGO or a corporate firm. Funds would follow."

A National Tiger Conservation Authority official said similar foundations have been formed at the level of tiger reserves across the country.

A second Union environment and forest ministry official said the money collected from tourists entering the tiger reserves are deposited in the tiger conservation foundations and are utilised for conservation. "The national foundation would be working on similar lines. In no way are we privatising our protected areas. This is only to facilitate India's wildlife conservation."

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