

Environment ministry brings all regional offices under one roof, new set-up from Oct

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Nagpur: In a major move, the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) has reorganized its regional and sub-regional offices in the country from 29 to 19. Now, all the offices will be under one roof and called as integrated regional offices (IROs) to be headed by deputy director general of forest (Dy DGF) called as regional officer.

The IROs will start functioning from October 1.

TOI on May 12 was first to report this. Now, the IROs will include offices of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), Central Zoo Authority (CZA), Forest Survey of India (FSI) and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB). In Nagpur, NTCA regional office will also be merged with MoEFCC office.

Though the decision has been taken in a bid to provide synergy and strength, and make regional offices more effective, there is still ambiguity about the notification as to whom the CZA, FSI, WCCB and NTCA officials report.

APCCF & regional officer, Nagpur, VN Ambade, said, "The orders relating to regional officers, administrative set up of the IROs, deployment of the staff and assets, budget allocation and ancillary matters will be issued soon."

Will the new set up hit tiger conservation? NTCA has three regional centres looking after 41 tiger reserves. These include Nagpur (17), Guwahati (10) and Bengaluru (14) spread in South, Central India and North-East.

These offices will be now attached to the respective regional MoEFCC offices. "We have read the reorganization notification which is ambiguous. The mandate of NTCA is completely different and the conservation interests may not match with the regional empowered committees (RECs). We fear there should not be two power centres," said a section of NTCA officials.

Pleading anonymity, they said NTCA has been constituted under provisions of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. “Can regional officers under the new structure be authorized under WPA?” they asked.

FSI officials said, “Forest Survey of India being a specialized institution created for forest cover mapping and forest inventory, it should not have been split and brought under the ambit of regional offices.”

As per the reorganization, the 19 IROs will be established through redeployment of human and other resources available with 10 regional offices of MoEFCC, 4 FSI offices, 3 NTCA regional centres, 4 regional offices of CZA, & 5 regional and 3 sub-regional offices of WCCB in an integrated manner. Each office will have representation from time to time.

In the new set up, 10 existing regional offices at Shillong, Ranchi, Bhubaneswar, Bengaluru, Chennai, Lucknow, Bhopal, Nagpur, Chandigarh and Dehradun will be headed by deputy DGF level officer (equivalent to APCCF rank). Seven out of nine new offices at Jaipur, Gandhinagar, Vijayawada, Raipur, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Guwahati will be headed by inspector general of forest (IGF) level officers (equivalent to CCF) drawn from NTCA and FSI.

The remaining two offices at Jammu and Shimla will be headed by deputy IGF-level officer (equivalent to CF) drawn from above four organizations. The staff strength of 703 sanctioned posts at 29 regional offices and centres will continue and will be redeployed among the 19 offices.

The issue was discussed at a meeting headed by director general of forests Sanjay Kumar on May 2. All regional environment ministry heads and NTCA, CZA, FSI and WCCB office in-charge working under MoEFCC attended.

However, the reorganization will benefit CZA. “In the present set up, CZA has to hire experts for evaluation of zoos, which is not only time-consuming but costly too. This is delaying many processes for effective management and modernization of zoos. Each zoo has to be evaluated annually, but in 2019-20, 117 cases of evaluation are pending. Now, this process will be expedited.”

