

Uttarakhand: Boosting 'riparian wildlife' latest focus of forest department

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DEHRADUN: With an aim to protect the habitat of aquatic flora and fauna of rivers, the Uttarakhand forest department has added riparian wildlife management in its area of focus. The scientists and researchers from Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have reached out to Rudraprayag division in this respect and started with the conservation of flora and fauna of Alaknanda and Mandakini rivers.

According to sources, under the Namami Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), the forest department has approved Rudraprayag forest division's plan to induct riparian wildlife management and the project will continue for the next ten months. The department has also given a go-ahead for the conservation of the banks of rivers.

"With October 24 (Saturday) being world fish migration day, our teams went out in the field under the aegis of scientists from WII. The staff was given the much-required information about the aquatic species ranging from different Himalayan fish species to smaller aquatic lives. Other associated parameters of a rich riparian habitat like water quality, vegetation, and basic ecology of Himalayan streams were also told to them," said Vaibhav Singh, DFO, Rudraprayag forest division.

Experts and conservationists have also underscored the urgent need to step up efforts to save riparian wildlife in Rudraprayag district, which has a number of hydroelectric power plants affecting the natural habitat of several aquatic species of rivers.

"Rudraprayag is surrounded by hydropower plants like Singoli-Bhatwari hydroelectric power plant, Srinagar hydroelectric plant, and Phata-Vyum hydroelectric power plant. Further, two other plants are all set to go operational and another got into some controversy after the 2013 Kedarnath deluge. It's important to note that such a small district has huge hydroelectric plants. This certainly impacts the aquatic life of rivers," said one of the experts present during the field visits on Saturday.

The forest department along with WII will also be doing a 'feasibility study on the reintroduction of otters' in the backwaters of Srinagar hydro-electric power plant.

"It's about saving rivers. If we save their habitats, several aquatic lives would automatically be saved. Otters have always been present in this valley and in a recent survey, their presence was found at just two spots in Alaknanda. The backwater of Srinagar hydro electric power plant can be a potential habitat of otters just like Bhimgoda barrage makes for a very good habitat for them," said K Sivakumar, senior scientist, WII.