

May 19, 2022

To,

Shri. Bhupender Yadav

Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change and
Chairman, Standing Committee, National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)
Government of India, Indira Paryavaran Bhavan,
166, Jor Bagh Road, Block-17, Lodhi Colony, New Delhi-110003

Subject: Request to realign the Katni-Singrauli railway line outside the Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh before its upgradation (doubling) and electrification.

Dear Sir,

We, the undersigned, would like to request you to kindly ensure that the proposed expansion (doubling) and electrification of Katni-Singrauli railway line that passes through the 'critical tiger habitat' of Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve and identified wildlife corridor of North Shahdol Forest Division, Madhya Pradesh, is diverted so as to bypass this important tiger reserve and ensure the ecological and conservation integrity of this landscape.

The existing Katni-Singrauli railway has already caused many wildlife mortalities and is becoming a serious conservation issue. We are dismayed to hear about the proposed expansion (doubling) and electrification of this line as it would magnify this conflict. Therefore, we request you to kindly ensure that the line is realigned outside these critical tiger forests so that the proposed expansion and electrification can happen without damaging the conservation integrity of Sanjay Dubri Landscape.

Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve (SDTR) is connected through corridors with Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve to the west and borders the Guru Ghasidas National Park in Chhattisgarh to the south. Bandhavgarh-SDTR-Guru Ghasidas landscape together constitutes 3607 sq.km. This landscape is also connected with Palamau Tiger Reserve in Jharkhand. Because of this strategic location the proposed expansion would not only split the SDTR landscape but disconnect all the above-mentioned conservation areas from each other. More importantly, this landscape harbours 141 (126-156) tigers¹ and has the potential to accommodate the increasing tiger population of Central India. We must plan our development in a way that does not undermine our conservation: with minimal effort and expense the two can be made compatible. In the recent past, wild elephants have traversed to Bandhavgarh-Sanjay-Dubri Landscape and have established a few smaller populations in these areas. National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India also have highlighted the importance of this landscape in the 'All India Tiger Estimation 2018' report. Also, this is the only area to the north of River Narmada where gaur, India's largest bovine, occurs.

The 27.5 km stretch of existing railway line connecting Katni to Singrauli in Madhya Pradesh passes through the 67-ha area of 'critical tiger habitat' of Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve and the 5.3 ha of dense forest areas of Sidhi district adjoining SDTR. The moderate amount of traffic on this existing route has already claimed life of a tigress from SDTR in April 2022 due to an accident while crossing the rail

¹ Jhala, Y.V., Qureshi, Q. and Nayak, A.K. (eds) 2020. Status of tigers, copredators and prey in India, 2018. National Tiger Conservation Authority, Government of India, New Delhi, and Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

tracks. The orphaned cubs of this tigress now face an uncertain future due to this unfortunate incident. There are 38 documented deaths (and many unrecorded) of wild animals along this route during 2010-2020. Between January to December 2020, the presence of tigers and leopards have been recorded 315 times in Dubri and Bastua ranges. The presence of tigers and elephants have been documented on both sides of the existing track in the corridor indicating crossing over of the tracks by India's National Animal and National Heritage Animal, respectively. Thus, the plan to double and electrify this existing railway line will result in an increase in speed and frequency of the trains and is likely to prove even more detrimental for the wild animals of this landscape. This will also require the cutting of 14,187 trees along this stretch and can cause permanent barrier for the wild animals. The realignment will forestall increasing controversy, and potential schedule disruptions and monetary losses as accidents will inevitably increase.

Scientific investigation has established that the tigers from Central India have high genetic diversity² which is mainly due to the functionality of the existing wildlife corridors. Habitat connectivity is paramount for long term conservation of tiger and elephant in the region and linear infrastructure projects such as the proposed expansion of Katni-Singrauli railway line must be planned appropriately to avoid comprising this.

In our assessment this proposed expansion and electrification of the present line would bisect a Tiger Reserve and a crucial forest corridor which will be highly detrimental to tiger conservation efforts, and hence must be prevented. We request you to kindly take up this conservation issue with the Indian Railways and request them to realign the route so that the upgradation can occur outside of SDTR (core and buffer) and so avoid damaging this precious landscape.

Please see a map attached (as Annexure) depicting the Bandhavgarh-Sanjay-Dubri Landscape having tiger, elephant and other wildlife presence, with the existing alignment of the Katni-Singrauli railway line, as also the alternate route recommended, which would avoid this destruction and damage.

Looking forward to a positive response.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,



Kedar Gore, Director, The Corbett Foundation and Member, IUCN-WCPA

(On behalf of the following members)

Dr. M. K. Ranjitsinh (IAS Retd.), Former Addl. Secretary, MoEF, Government of India

Dr. A. J. T. Johnsingh, Former Dean, Wildlife Institute of India and former Member, NBWL

Kishor Rithe, Satpuda Foundation and Former Member, SC-NBWL

Dr. Bivash Pandav, Director, Bombay Natural History Society, former Member, SC-NBWL

Bittu Sahgal, Founder, Sanctuary Nature Foundation and former Member, NBWL

Debi Goenka, Executive Trustee, Conservation Action Trust, Mumbai

² Natesh, M., Atla, G., Nigam, P. *et al.* Conservation priorities for endangered Indian tigers through a genomic lens. *Sci Rep* **7**, 9614 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-09748-3>

Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, Former Director, BNHS and former Member, SC-NBWL
Dr. Divyabhanusinh Chavda, former Member, NBWL and SC-NBWL
Dr. Raghu Chundawat, President, Baavan - Bagh Aap Aur Van
Harshawardhan Dhanwatey, President, Tiger Research and Conservation Trust
Dr. Nishikant Kale President, Nature Conservation Society, Amravati
Nirmal Ghosh, Former Member, Steering Committee, Project Elephant, MoEF
Dr. Naveen Pandey, Invited Guest Lecturer, Ecosystem Health and Species Conservation, the University of Edinburgh, UK

Copy to:

1. Hon'ble Minister of Railways, Government of India, New Delhi
2. Secretary (EF&CC), Government of India, New Delhi
3. Chairman, Railway Board, New Delhi
4. Director General of Forest, MoEFCC, New Delhi
5. Member Secretary, National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi
6. Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Madhya Pradesh
7. APCCF and Field Director, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh
8. CCF and Field Director, Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh
9. Chief Conservator of Forest, Shahdol Circle, Madhya Pradesh
10. Divisional Forest Officer, North Shahdol Forest Division, Madhya Pradesh

Address for communication:

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Annexure

