

## 3. Tiger Safari – Environment

Tiger safaris only in 'non-forest land' or 'degraded forest land', not in core habitats, says SC

The Supreme Court has banned tiger safaris in core areas, mandated "rescue-linked" safaris in buffer/fringe zones, and directed states to treat Human-Wildlife Conflict as a "natural disaster" while strictly regulating tourism and infrastructure in Tiger Reserves.

### Supreme Court Guidelines on Tiger Conservation & Human-Wildlife Conflict

#### 1. Introduction

The Supreme Court has issued a comprehensive set of directions aimed at restricting commercial and intrusive activities—such as tiger safaris, mining, and unchecked infrastructure development—within and around Tiger Reserves. The judgment seeks to address the escalating crisis of Human-Wildlife Conflicts (HWCs) and prioritize the ecological integrity of critical habitats over tourism and profit.

#### 2. Directions on Tiger Tourism (Safari Reforms)

The Court has overhauled the operational model of tiger safaris to ensure they do not disturb wild populations.

##### **Prohibition in Core Areas**

**Rule** – Tiger safaris are strictly prohibited in core areas or "Critical Tiger Habitats."

**Rationale** – These zones must remain inviolate (untouched) to ensure the natural breeding and movement of tigers.

**Permissible Locations** – Safaris can only be established on non-forest land or degraded forest land.

**Restriction** – These areas must not fall within a designated Tiger Corridor (pathways used by tigers to move between reserves).

**The "Rescue-Linked" Model** – Safaris cannot capture wild tigers for display. They must operate exclusively in association with a full-fledged rescue and rehabilitation centre.

**Animals Permitted** – Only conflict, injured, or abandoned tigers sourced from the *same landscape* can be housed in these safaris.

#### 3. Management of Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC)

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The Court emphasized moving from a reactionary approach to a structured disaster management approach.

**Classification as "Natural Disaster"** - The Court urged States to classify HWC as a "Natural Disaster."

**Benefit** - This enables swifter distribution of relief funds and fixes accountability on state administration (e.g., Uttar Pradesh has already implemented this notification).

### Ex-Gratia Compensation

**Mandate** - States are mandated to pay ₹10 lakh ex-gratia for every human death caused by HWC.

**Basis** - This aligns with the norms under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) scheme.

**Uniform Policy** - The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) must issue model guidelines on HWC within six months. States are required to implement these guidelines within the same timeline.

**About Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)** - A Centrally Sponsored Scheme by the MoEFCC aimed at supporting wildlife conservation, protection of habitats outside protected areas, and recovery programs for critically endangered species.

## 4. Regulation of Activities - Prohibitions vs. Regulations

| Category         | Strictly Prohibited Activities                                                                                  | Regulated Activities (Subject to Norms)                      |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Industry & infra | Commercial mining, Sawmills, Polluting industries, Major hydroelectric projects.                                | Road widening (with mitigation), Fencing.                    |
| Forestry         | Tree felling without prior permission.                                                                          | Sustainable use of natural water resources.                  |
| Tourism/Air      | Tourism-linked low-flying aircraft (Drones, Hot-air balloons).                                                  | Establishment of Hotels and Resorts (Strictly eco-friendly). |
| Aircraft Rule    | Aircraft must maintain a minimum height of 300 meters above the highest obstacle if within 8 km of the reserve. | Night vehicular movement (Restricted exceptions).            |

## 5. Tourism & Infrastructure Guidelines

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The Court drew a clear line between "Ecotourism" and "Mass Tourism."

**Ecotourism Definition** – Tourism infrastructure in buffer zones must strictly adhere to Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) norms. The Court stated, "*Ecotourism cannot resemble mass tourism.*"

**Resort Regulations** – New resorts must be eco-friendly. Allowed only in buffer zones. Strictly banned in wildlife corridors.

**Community Participation** – Promotion of Homestays and community-run establishments is encouraged through state incentives to ensure local communities' benefit from conservation.

### Digital Detox & Night Ban

**Mobile Phones** – Prohibited in tourism zones within core habitats to reduce disturbance.

**Night Tourism** – Completely banned in tiger reserves.

**Night Traffic** – No vehicular traffic from dusk to dawn on roads passing through core habitats, except for ambulances/emergency vehicles.

## 6. Time-Bound Directions to States

The Court set specific deadlines to ensure compliance

**3 Months** – States must prepare a Tiger Conservation Plan (TCP). The NTCA will monitor compliance, and Steering Committees must meet at least twice a year.

**6 Months** – All States must notify the Core and Buffer areas of their respective Tiger Reserves.

**1 Year** – States must notify Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ) around all tiger reserves (including fringe areas).

**Criterion** – ESZ formulation must follow the MoEFCC April 2018 guidelines, ensuring minimum ESZ areas cover buffer or fringe zones.

## 7. Static Concept – Structure of a Tiger Reserve

A Tiger Reserve is a statutory category under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, managed under Project Tiger (launched 1973).

| Zone                                          | Description                                                                   | Permitted Activities                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Core Area<br/>(Critical Tiger Habitat)</b> | The innermost area with the highest legal protection. Must be kept inviolate. | No human interference; strictly for conservation and scientific monitoring.             |
| <b>Buffer Area</b>                            | The area surrounding the core. Acts as a shock absorber.                      | Regulated activities – Eco-tourism, limited grazing, sustainable livelihood for locals. |

| Zone                            | Description                             | Permitted Activities                                                  |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)</b> | The transition zone outside the Buffer. | Regulated development to prevent ecological isolation of the reserve. |

## 8. Significance of the Judgment

**Ecological Restoration** – It aims to reverse long-term damage caused by commercial exploitation (mining/resorts).

**Primacy of Core Areas** – Reasserts that Core areas are for tigers, not tourists.

**Governance Strengthening** – Mandates the finalization of Tiger Conservation Plans (TCP) and ESZ notifications, which many states had delayed.

**Institutionalizing HWC Support** – By treating HWC as a "disaster," it ensures a structural, rather than ad-hoc, response to human fatalities.

Source - <https://theprint.in/judiciary/tiger-safaris-only-in-non-forest-land-or-degraded-forest-land-not-in-core-habitats-says-sc/2786482/>