

2. Tiger Conservation Policy- Environment

Govt forms expert groups for upgrade of 50-year-old Project Tiger scheme

Marking 50 years of tiger conservation, the environment minister has urged a comprehensive policy review to modernize frameworks, focusing on conflict management, population estimation, and infrastructure. This domestic overhaul complements India's global leadership through the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) and the statutory mandates of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Context- Ministerial Call for Review

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav has called for a comprehensive review of India's tiger conservation policies as the nation marks 50 years of tiger conservation. The focus is on modernizing the framework to address emerging challenges.

Review of NTCA Meetings- The Minister urged a detailed review of all past policy decisions to categorize them into three types-

- a. Outdated decisions.
- b. Unimplemented decisions.
- c. Fully executed decisions.

Formal Policy Consolidation

- a. There is a proposal to consolidate five decades of scattered policy decisions into a single Formal Policy Statement.
- b. This consolidation is to be placed as the first agenda item in the upcoming National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) meeting.

Key Priority Areas for Reform

The conference highlighted specific areas requiring immediate attention and structural changes.

Tiger Population Estimation- A need for focused deliberation to improve the methodologies and accuracy of tiger population estimation exercises.

Rescue and Rehabilitation Infrastructure- Emphasis was placed on strengthening infrastructure for rescue, rehabilitation, and transit treatment centres located around tiger reserves.

Human-Wildlife Conflict- Active management of human-wildlife interactions were identified as a major emerging necessity due to increasing overlap between tiger habitats and human settlements.

Fund Utilization- The Minister stressed the need for better utilization of the Tiger Reserve Fund and resources allocated under Project Tiger.

Institutional Strengthening- There is a call to strengthen Tiger Conservation Foundations to ensure long-term financial and operational sustainability.

Formation of Regional Working Groups

To address the diverse ecological challenges across India, the Minister proposed a decentralized approach.

Structure- Establishment of four region-specific working groups.

Mandate- Examine region-specific challenges, including fluctuations in tiger populations. Assess the on-ground implementation of centrally sponsored conservation schemes across various tiger reserves.

Tiger Conservation Framework in India

This section outlines the institutional and statutory mechanisms governing tiger protection.

Project Tiger

Launch- Launched in 1973 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Objective- To ensure viable tiger populations and protect critical habitats.

First Implementation- Started at Jim Corbett National Park.

Highest Population- Madhya Pradesh currently holds the highest tiger population.

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)-

Establishment- Established in 2005.

Statutory Status- It is a statutory body constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (via the 2006 Amendment).

Mandate- It approves tiger conservation plans, monitors reserves, and ensures strict adherence to Project Tiger guidelines.

Tiger Reserves Network-

Purpose- Created under Project Tiger to provide safe breeding habitats.

Administration- Directly administered by the NTCA.

Current Count- 58 Tiger Reserves.

State with Most Reserves- Madhya Pradesh (9 reserves).

Largest Reserve- Nagarjunsagar- Srisailem Tiger Reserve (spanning Andhra Pradesh and Telangana).

Population Trends and Statistics (2022 Census)

Data from the latest census indicates robust growth in India's tiger numbers.

Total Population- Estimated at 3,682 tigers (average number).

Global Share- India harbors approximately 75% of the world's wild tiger population.

Growth Rate- The population has grown at an annual rate of about 6% since 2006.

State-wise Rankings-

- Madhya Pradesh- 785
- Karnataka- 563
- Uttarakhand- 560
- Maharashtra- 444

Reserve Density (Abundance)-

- Corbett- Highest abundance (260 tigers).
- Bandipur- 150 tigers.
- Nagarhole- 141 tigers.

Conservation Tools and Mechanisms

India employs a mix of ecological management and technology for conservation.

Tiger Corridors

Function- These connect protected areas to allow safe movement, preventing genetic isolation and supporting long-term species survival.

Status- There are 32 major corridors identified across the country.

Key Examples

- Rajaji-Corbett- Shivalik Hills & Gangetic Plains.
- Ranthambhore-Kuno-Madhav- Central India & Eastern Ghats.
- Nagarhole-Bandipur-Mudumalai-Wayanad- Western Ghats.
- Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong- North East India.

All India Tiger Estimation (Tiger Census)-

- Frequency- Conducted once every 4 years.
- Implementation- Led by NTCA in collaboration with State Forest Departments and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

MSTripes Programme-

- Full Form- Monitoring System for Tigers- Intensive Protection and Ecological Status.
- Purpose- A technology-based monitoring system aiding in real-time patrolling, database creation, and ecological assessment.

Legal Protection-

- Act- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Status- Tigers are listed under Schedule I, affording them the highest degree of protection.

Global Cooperation Initiatives

India plays a leadership role in global big cat conservation through several key international bodies.

Global Tiger Forum (GTF)

It is an international intergovernmental organization.

Headquarters- Located in New Delhi, India.

Aim- It aims to promote international cooperation specifically for tiger conservation.

Global Tiger Initiative (GTI)-

Launch- Established in 2008 as a global partnership involving governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector.

Objective- Seeks to prevent tiger extinction through coordinated global action.

Expansion- In 2013, its mandate was expanded to include Snow Leopard conservation.

International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)-

Overview- A treaty-based intergovernmental organization established to promote the global conservation of major big cat species.

Establishment- Officially launched in April 2023, marking 50 years of Project Tiger, and formalized as an international legal entity in 2024.

Headquarters- Based in New Delhi, India.

Core Focus Species- It works for the protection of seven major big cat species- Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma.

Global Summit- The Union Budget 2026-27 has announced that the first Global Big Cat Summit will be hosted in India.

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