

Chapter 5

Commercial activities in and around the Protected Areas and Eco-tourism

Protected Areas being treasure troves of biodiversity, it is of utmost importance to regulate activities which have a negative impact on wildlife habitats. Growing commercial activities like small hydel projects, resorts, homestays, plantations, *etc.*, in and around Protected Areas have become a source of concern and MoEF issued (February 2011) guidelines for declaration of eco-sensitive zones around PAs to minimise the ecological damage from such developmental activities. The guidelines prohibited undertaking several activities (commercial mining, saw mills, setting of industries causing pollution, establishment of major hydroelectric projects, *etc.*) and brought establishment of hotels / resorts, commercial use of natural water resources, *etc.*, under regulated activities.

Status of declaration of eco-sensitive zone

In respect of sampled National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, eco-sensitive zone was notified (2012) only in respect of Bandipur National Park while draft notifications have been issued for other Protected Areas except Rajiv Gandhi (Nagarahole) National Park.

Major commercial activities impacting negatively on wildlife habitats are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

5.1 Mini Hydel Projects

Hydro electric projects up to 25 Mega Watt (MW) capacity are classified as Small Hydel Projects. These are built across streams / rivers for generation of electricity and are popularly called Mini Hydel Projects (MHPs). The MHPs are exempted from impact assessments as per Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, 2006. In the State, Karnataka Renewable Energy Development Limited (KREDL) is the nodal agency for implementation of MHPs. Till the end of March 2015, 92 MHPs had been commissioned while 209 MHPs had received approval for establishment in Western Ghats region, inscribed as World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Impact caused due to construction of MHPs, as evidenced by independent research / Departmental observations have been brought out in the succeeding Paragraph.

5.1.1 Impact of Mini Hydel Projects

Though MHPs are exempted from EIA studies, they do cause landscape disturbances, disrupt biodiversity and fragment habitats owing to construction of penstock, canals, transmission lines, roads, *etc.*, which cumulatively cause significant disruption of river and forest system during construction in particular and to a lesser extent in the operation phase³¹. A pictorial depiction of a typical MHP is shown in **Fig 5.1**:

³¹ EMPRI Study Report(2014) on significant impact of activities not covered by EIA, 2006

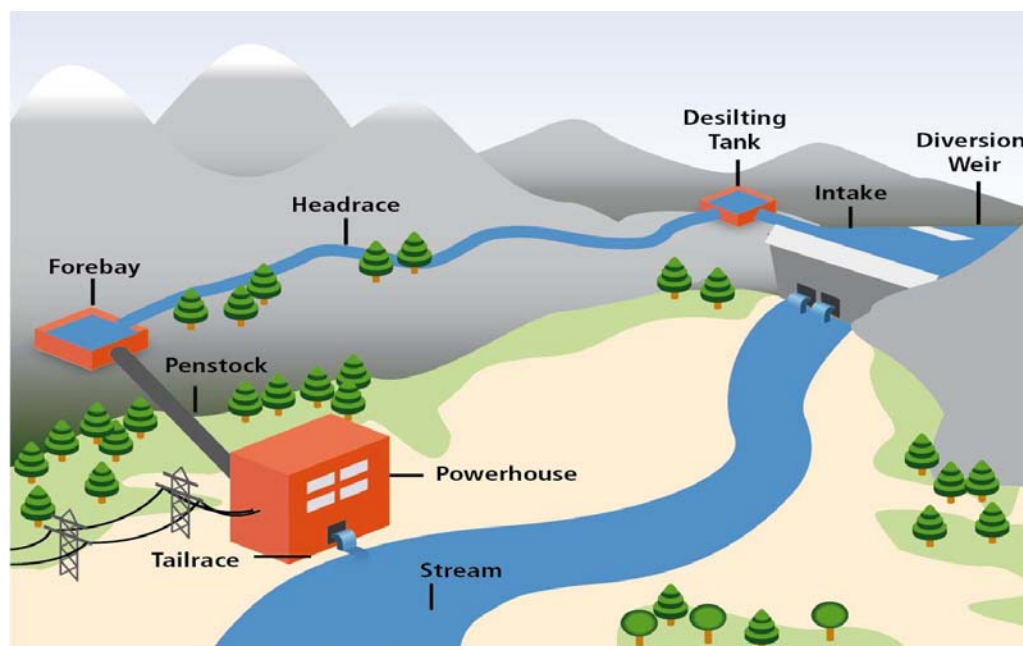


Fig 5.1: Pictorial depiction of components of a run of river Mini Hydel Project

Source: Alternate Hydro Energy Centre, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

We observed that some MHPs are functioning / under construction in or around Pushpagiri, Malai Mahadeshwara and Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuaries. While one is located inside the PA, the others are located within seven km of the PA borders as shown at **Table 5.1:**

Table 5.1: Details of Mini Hydel Projects in and around Protected Areas

Sl No	Name of the Project	Date of commissioning	Distance from PA	Name of the Protected Area
1	Beedalli Mini Hydel Project	13.06.2016	1.50 km	Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary
2	Bhoruka Power Project	14.09.2006	6.76 km	MM Wildlife Sanctuary
3	Pioneer private Ltd. RMHP (24.75MW)	29.07.2007	1.94 km	MM Wildlife Sanctuary
4	Cauvery Hydro power project(3MW)	10.09.1998	1.21 km	MM Wildlife Sanctuary
5	Atria Power Project (6MW),Shivanasamudra	01.08.2001	600 m	MM Wildlife Sanctuary
6	Pioneer Private Ltd(24 MW)	01.07.2005	50 m	Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary
7	Atria Power Project (24MW), Ganalu	01.11.2001 24.10.2011	50 m	Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary
8	Limbavali Power Project (12MW)	07.04.2009	Falls within the sanctuary	Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

Source: Karnataka Forest Department

Several studies have brought out the negative impact of the MHPs which are stated as under:

- ❖ The construction of Kadumane-2 MHP in Western Ghats region has affected the pattern of water flow of streams, tributaries and rivers due to the change in their course of natural flow. This diversion of water flow has a cascading effect on the hydrology of the aquatic system, fish migration, other aquatic life forms and wildlife which are part of this fragile ecosystem. Further, soil erosion / damage occurs due to power evacuation

lines and heavy rainfall (about 5,000 mm/year) on these steep terrains which causes un-repairable damage to this fragile geological area³².

- ❖ Though all the MHPs require ground clearance before commencement of the Project which includes clearing of standing trees, the record of the extent of trees removed was not available in all the cases. In respect of Kadumane-2 MHP, located in the area proposed for expansion of Pushpagiri WLS, 432³³ trees were removed from this biodiversity rich Western Ghat region. In the case of Limbavali MHP, several trees such as Sandal, Mathi, Honge, Karagi and other trees were also removed, though the numbers are not available on record.
- ❖ The Mudumalai- Nagarahole- Brahmagiri- Muthodi migratory path is one of the two most important traditional migratory routes in Southern India and this includes Bisle RF, Kaginahare (*i.e.*, Kaganeri), Kanchankumari and Kempole RF. Elephants move from Mudumalai National Park towards Nagarahole, further via Pushpagiri WLS and Bisle RF up to Muthodi. This rich and diverse patch of vegetation provides ample resources for elephants moving in these routes. The establishment of MHPs in this region has not only fragmented the forest but also disrupted the migratory path, which is now witnessing increased Human–Elephant conflicts.
- ❖ Four³⁴ MHPs located in Kempole, Kaganeri and Kanchanakumari RF area which is a very important Elephant Corridor between two high profile wildlife areas of Nagarahole TR and Pushpagiri WLS in the South. These RFs are very rich in biodiversity and are a high centre of endemism including endangered species like elephants and slender lorris, near threatened species like grey-headed bulbul, malabar pied hornbill, etc. Recognising the biological / ecological / social importance of these RFs, they were proposed for inclusion in the expansion of Pushpagiri WLS. Considering the ecological status and sensitivity of the area, the endangered flora and fauna, such area *per se* is not to be diverted for non-forestry purposes³⁵.”
- ❖ The Chief Conservator of Forests and Field Director (CCF & FD), Project Elephant, Mysuru in his letter (26 September 2011) to the PCCF -WL stated that elephants were impacted by the MHPs (Limbavali, Atria, MS Mini Hydel and Pioneer) causing disturbance in their home range and that elephants were straying out in small groups of five to seven elephants for crop raiding, resulting in escalation of Human Elephant Conflict. The CCF & FD had observed that for mitigating Human Elephant Conflicts in the area, it was necessary to take immediate action to make the home range area free from disturbance, non-government / private lands around the Reserved Forest have to be acquired by the Department, growing of crops like banana, sugarcane, maize, *etc.*, are to be discouraged (**Appendix 3**).

³²Central Empowered Committee report on alleged illegal diversion of forest lands for non-forest uses in the Western Ghats region in Karnataka

³³Report submitted by Deputy Conservator of Forests, Territorial Division, Hassan

³⁴ Kadumane-1, Kadumane-2, IPCL Kempole and Maruthi Power Gen

³⁵ Opinion of the PCCF (Head of Forest Force) vide letter dated on 19.3.2014 on the Kempole, Kaganeri and Kanchanakumari Reserve Forest

However, no remedial actions were taken to make the home range free from disturbances.

- ❖ A study³⁶ in respect of IPCL Kempole Project (18 MW) found that the weir was approximately 21 metre in height, higher than 100 MW projects in the country and at least nine metre taller than the 97 MW Tashiding Hydro Electric Project in Sikkim. Diversion of water for the project had left about one km of the river bed almost dry which was bound to affect the wildlife and ecosystem of the area. Audit could not assess the deviations by the project proponents, considering the huge structures constructed, as the Department did not furnish any records in this regard. The matter requires serious investigation.

The above impacts have been observed in respect of other MHPs located in the Western Ghat-Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve region, the cumulative impact of these MHPs could be more severe on the fragile ecology of this biodiversity rich region. Since EIA is not applicable for MHPs, these structures are mushrooming at an alarming rate which needs to be regulated through some means of ecological assessments prior to approval of the project. In reply, the Government stated that a committee has been formed for assessing the carrying capacity of the Western Ghat region with reference to MHPs.

5.1.2 Violations by Mini Hydel Project Proponents

Section 2 of Forest (Conservation) (FC) Act, 1980 requires that no forests shall be diverted for non-forestry purposes without approval of MoEF. Also, conditions imposed at the time of project clearance must be adhered to by the project proponents and monitored by the concerned authorities. Our scrutiny revealed several violations by the project proponents which are discussed below:

5.1.2.1 Mini Hydel Projects not obtaining clearance under Forest (Conservation) Act

a) Beedalli MHP (3 MW) taken up by M/s Kodagu Hydel Project Private Ltd, was approved in April 2006. After substantial completion of work (expenditure of ₹ 13 crore), it was noticed that the project was being carried out in deemed forest area and the project authorities had not obtained clearance as per FC Act. The project, situated in the eco-sensitive area of the Pushpagiri WLS, had broken up the contiguous forests in the Western Ghat region and removed a large number of trees. This river bank is incidentally the only location in which *Madhuca insignis*, a critically endangered riparian species once thought to be extinct was rediscovered in 2004 after a gap of 120 years, grows. Substantial damages had already been caused due to construction activities taken up at the site. The opening up of forests and fragmentation of habitat could be seen from the two satellite imageries of the locations as shown in **Fig 5.2 (a) and (b)**:

³⁶ A case study by Green Norms for Green Energy, Small Hydro Power, Centre for Science and Environment 2013 on MHP in Karnataka



Fig 5.2: (a) Imagery dated 26/2/2010 of the site; (b): Imagery dated 7/2/2014 of the site
Source: Google earth

The matter was taken to the Karnataka High Court which ordered (June 2014) for obtaining necessary approval for diversion under FC Act. In reply, the PCCF -WL stated that the PCCF- Head of Forest Force (HoFF) is seized of this issue, the wildlife wing in close association with PCCF-HoFF would follow up this case scrupulously. It was, however, observed that the project had been commissioned in June 2016.

b) Limbavali Power Project: This Project with a capacity of 12 MW is located at Dhanagur State Forest under survey No. 277 of Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary and at Daballi Survey No. 77 and was in operation since 2005-06 without clearance from FC Act. The project proponent, without obtaining approval of the Department and Chief Wildlife Warden, whose approval is also required for taking up projects in Protected Areas / forests rich in wildlife, commenced power generation though this area was an established elephant corridor. Also, the project proponent had encroached 200 *acres* of forest land in Dhanagur RF. As the Department had failed to take cognizance of the project even though it has been operating on encroached land for more than six years, PCCF-HoFF instructed Conservator of Forests, Mysuru Circle to examine the matter and fix the responsibility. Subsequently, in view of violations of FC Act, 1980, Section 24 of Karnataka Forest Act, 1963 and for operating the MHP without obtaining prior approval of State Board for Wildlife, the premises of the MHP was seized (January 2016) by the Department. Aggrieved by this action, the project proponent filed a Writ Petition in the High Court and obtained stay order (February 2016). The action taken by the Department to get stay vacated has not been intimated.

5.1.2.2 Transmission lines passing through forests without approval

a) Atria Power Project (24MW), Ganalu: The project located on 13.35 *acres* of land adjacent to Basavana betta RF of Cauvery WLS is in operation since 2004. Project proponents had drawn transmission lines in an area of five *acres* in Dhanagur RFs of Cauvery WLS without obtaining necessary approval. This MHP along with other MHPs like Limbavali, Atria, MS Hydro Power Project and Pioneer Mini Hydrel projects, were found to be causing accumulated disturbances in the last ten years resulting in increased Human Elephant

Conflicts³⁷. Though the project proponents were found to be functioning in violation of provisions of FC Act, no action was taken until January 2016 when notice was issued to the MHP by the Range Forest Officer concerned for violating the FC Act and Karnataka Forest Act.

b) Pioneer Power Corporation Ltd, (Ranganatha Swamy Mini Hydel Project): The Department had approved diversion³⁸ 4.863 ha of forest land to the project proponent for establishment of MHP of 24.75 MW capacity which was commissioned in 2007. Elephant Task Force set up by the High Court of Karnataka opined (September 2012) that the project should not have been approved as the forest area was an elephant and other wildlife movement path. Hence, required approval of Chief Wildlife Warden (PCCF-WL) as per instructions issued in 1998 and diversion of forest land was accorded without proper assessment.

Karnataka Elephant Task Force³⁹ in their report (September 2012) concluded that ill-planned commercial infrastructure projects caused fragmentation of forest and termed location of MHPs in Sakleshpur and Malavalli taluks as ill-advised. Karnataka High Court in their order (October 2013)⁴⁰ had directed Government of Karnataka to review the non-forest activities in the elephant habitat and corridor and also to take appropriate action where violations had occurred. However, as evident from the encroachments and other violations brought out above, no action has been taken to comply with the above direction which has resulted in continued pressure on these habitats.

PCCF -WL in reply stated (September 2016) that the Department is reviewing all these projects in the elephant habitat and corridors. The reply was general in nature and indicated that no concrete action had been taken by the Department in any of these cases though High Court had passed orders to review all cases and assessment of potential impacts for new projects in 2013 itself.

During the Exit Conference (March 2017), the Government stated that a Committee has been formed for assessing the carrying capacity of Western Ghats with reference to MHPs and no new MHPs would be permitted in the region. However, the Government was silent with reference to the MHPs already existing, appropriate action needs to be taken wherever violations have been noticed.

Recommendation 4: Any new commissioning of Mini Hydel Projects should be subjected to appropriate environment assessment.

³⁷ Letter addressed on 26/9/2011 by CCF and Field Director, Project Elephant, Mysuru

³⁸ G.O. No FEE 41 FLL dated 26.10.2005

³⁹ Karnataka Elephant Task Force constituted by High Court of Karnataka

⁴⁰ Para 28 (v) of High court judgment dated 8th October, 2008 n WP No 14029/2008

5.2 Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism activities are promoted inside the Protected Areas for creating awareness / nature education. Department of Tourism is promoting eco-tourism as the thrust area as Karnataka is bestowed with natural forests and home to flagship species. As eco-tourism is gaining popularity over the years, demand for resorts, homestays, recreational activities is increasing. The heavy inflow of tourists in protected area causes disturbances to animals.

5.2.1 Un-regulated tourists inside Protected Areas

The Protected Areas are the nature's repository of various species of flora and fauna and have been so designated by statutory provisions for *in-situ* conservation of these invaluable rich forest resources. The Government had issued (July 2011) instructions to assess and fix the carrying capacity⁴¹, for each Protected Area from time to time.

In Brahmagiri, Pushpagiri and Talacauvery WLSs, the tourist inflow had steadily increased between 2011-12 and 2015-16. In respect of Mookambika, Someshwara, Sharavathi WLSs and Kudremukh NP, the tourist inflow was highest during 2015-16. However, none of these sanctuaries had assessed the carrying capacity. Though the Kudremukh WL Division stated that the carrying capacity had been assessed for various sites of Kudremukh NP and Someshwara WLS and approved by Chief Wildlife Warden and the carrying capacity of Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary was being worked out, these were not furnished to Audit. Audit could not ensure that utilisation of the tourism potential of these sanctuaries was within the carrying capacity.

5.2.1.1 Operation of tourist vehicles in excess of the assessed carrying capacity in Tiger Reserves

Vehicular movement inside Protected Areas must be restricted as the noise and pollution of the vehicles cause disturbance to the wildlife. The maximum noise level permitted inside PAs was 50 decibels (dB) during day time and 40 dB during night time. The number of vehicles that could be permitted in the PAs for each day was assessed based on the carrying capacity. Audit observed that these restrictions were not followed as discussed below.

In BRT Tiger Reserve, as against the ceiling of 14 vehicles per day (*i.e.* 7 each during morning and evening as per assessed carrying capacity), 32 trips were being operated daily. In Bandipur TR, it was observed that the assessed carrying capacity was 20-22 trips per day which would translate to 660 trips per month. However, it was seen that 1,004, 683 and 853 safari trips were operated during the months of May, August and October 2015 respectively which exceeded the permissible carrying capacity. Further, the details of trips done by Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) were not produced to Audit, in the absence of which the actual number of trips during this period would be higher taking into account the trips operated by JLR.

⁴¹ Maximum number of tourists a site can sustain.

Forests are silence zones wherein the maximum sound limit permissible was 50 dB during day time. It was observed that Bandipur TR was using 18 Departmental vehicles for safari out of which two vehicles were more than 20 years old, three were 12 years old and all these vehicles ran on diesel. A study conducted by CF, Research Wing during 2012⁴² had observed that sound level of vehicles of make 2009-11 was in the range of 75 to 80 dB and safari jeeps of 2007 make was 65 dB, all of which were beyond the permissible levels. However, no action was taken to ensure that only vehicles emitting sound within permissible levels were used for safari purposes.

Recommendation 5: Tourist flow needs to be strictly controlled based on the carrying capacity. Online booking for safaris may be explored to control the flow of the tourists.

5.3 Resorts in and around Protected Areas

5.3.1 Commercial hotels and resorts

As per guidelines issued for declaration of eco-sensitive zone, operation of commercial establishment is a regulated activity inside the eco-sensitive zone. In the absence of notification of eco-sensitive zone, this was to be up to ten kms from the boundary of the Protected Area. Further, the Wilderness Tourism Policy, 2004 do not permit establishment of commercial hotels and resorts inside National Park / Sanctuaries and their enclosures. In addition, resorts are also to be regulated by Karnataka State Pollution Control Board and Department of Tourism.

On scrutiny, it was observed that as many as 51 resorts / hotels were found to be functioning in and around six sampled Protected Areas as detailed in **Table 5.2:**

Table 5.2: Resorts functioning in and around Protected Areas

Protected Area	Located at	Total working	Approved by Forest Department
Bandipur Tiger Reserve	Eco-sensitive zone	19	6
Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve	Inside enclosures	4	0
Kudremukh National Park	Eco-sensitive zone	1	0
Bhadra Tiger Reserve	Around Protected Area	11	1
Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary	Within PA/enclosure	3	0
Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve	Around PA	13	0
Total		51	7

Source: Departmental statistics and Audit compilation

As can be seen from the above, out of 51 resorts / commercial establishments, only seven were approved by the Department. It was also observed that the lists of resorts furnished by the Department were obtained from Department of Tourism and the Forest Department did not have its own data. As commercial

⁴² Environmental Impact conducted in 2012 with reference to Bandipur Tiger Reserve were carried out by Freeda Maria Swarna, Scientist of KETB and Sri Manojkumar, IFS, CF, Research Wing

activity like hotels and resorts needs to be regulated in and around the Protected Areas, the absence of approval / regulation will have an indirect but significant impact on the wildlife and its habitats. Therefore, it is important to enforce strict regulations on these activities in eco-sensitive zone and enclosures.

Further, observations with reference to different PAs are detailed as under:

- ❖ **Bandipur Tiger Reserve:** This is the only PA for which eco-sensitive zone has been notified in the State. Out of nineteen resorts / hotels found to be functioning, only six had been approved by the Department. Of the six approved, four resorts *viz.*, the Country Club, Tusker Trails, The Serai and Dhole's Den are in Mangala village located in the Kaniyanapura corridor.
 - Out of the approved Resorts, Tiger Ranch was located in the buffer zone and elephant corridor and was also near the water hole frequented by wild animals. Though the Department had requested (November 2012) the Deputy Commissioner, Chamarajanagar to cancel the permission accorded, the resort is still functioning. The Division stated (November 2016) that the resort is not being operated and the issue is in Karnataka High Court. However, we observed that the resort was functional and bookings were evidenced from the internet and people's opinion on the internet.
 - Ashwini Ayurvedic Jungle Resorts was found to be constructed on land approved for house construction. Even though the allotment was subsequently cancelled (August 2011) by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) who further ordered (March 2012) demolition of the structures, the same could not be enforced due to stay order (May 2012) of the High Court. Though it was replied (September 2016) that action is being taken to close this resort, the fact that stay order has not been got vacated by the Department indicates the contrary position.
 - The Serai (earlier called as Cicada) was functioning from 2005, i.e., much earlier to notification (2011-12) of Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) of Bandipur National Park. This resort was closed for renovation between June 2011 and May 2012 during which period draft notification of ESZ was issued (September 2011). As per the draft notification, operation of commercial activity is a regulated activity and further expansion required prior approval of National Board for Wildlife. However, though it was stated that only renovation work was being taken up, we observed that the built up area of the resort was expanded. As no approval was obtained, the expansion was in violation of the ESZ notification. In reply, the Department stated that expansion to the resort was not allowed after declaration of draft notification of ESZ. The reply is not acceptable since expansion of the resort was actually taken up and expanded facility commenced operations after declaration of draft notification without taking prior approval of NBWL.
- ❖ **Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve:** Four hotels/ commercial establishments, *viz.*, Gorukana-Champakaranya run by Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra and other establishments like

Akash, Rajathadri and Giridarshini were functioning inside enclosures⁴³ contrary to Wilderness Tourism Policy.

- ❖ In **Kudremukh National Park**, the Sahyadri Guest House was found to be operating commercially by Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited inside the ESZ without approval of the Forest Department.
- ❖ Eleven resorts were found to be functioning within 0.5 to 10 km from the Tiger Reserve and all of these did not have the approval of the Forest Department. Since the ESZ of the sanctuary is yet to be notified, the Department needs to regulate the activity up to 10 km. Also, Green Woods Resort was found to be operating in pristine shola forests on the mountain slopes of Jagara valley, which was in complete defiance to observations of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- ❖ **Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary:** Two resorts were found to be operated by JLR at Bheemeshwari and Galibore for which necessary approval under FC Act, 1980 is yet to be obtained. In addition, one private resort *i.e.*, Om Shantidhama was found to be operating inside an enclosure contrary to the provisions of Wilderness Tourism Policy, 2004.

5.3.2 Homestays

The Tourism Policy of Karnataka for the period 2009-10 to 2013-14 states that the “Athiti” homestays up to five rooms will be encouraged to be developed across the State which will be treated as a non-commercial activity. Hence, approval of Department of Tourism is necessary for running of these homestays. Audit scrutiny revealed that 50 homestays were found to be operating in and around Bhadra and Dandeli-Anshi TRs of which 35 were approved by Department of Tourism as detailed in **Table 5.3:**

Table 5.3: Homestays in Bhadra and Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve

(In numbers)

	Total working	Approved	Not approved
Bhadra TR	14	5	9
Dandeli Anshi TR	36	30	6
Total	50	35	15

(Source: Details furnished by the Karnataka Forest Department)

Further scrutiny revealed that:

- ❖ In Bhadra TR, two homestays were found to be operating with more than five rooms contrary to the provisions of homestay policy and hence were to be reckoned as resorts / commercial activities. However, no action was taken against these homestays by Department of Tourism. Further, with reference to nine homestays located in Muthodi Range, no action was taken to identify the numbers of rooms operated by the homestays.
- ❖ NTCA during their inspection (July 2012) observed that many commercial resorts / homestays were being constructed and these would affect the ecology of these pristine forests by means of pollution and their structures

⁴³ Revenue villages / habitations located inside the Sanctuary / National Park

along the streamlines could affect the flow of perennial water and make them seasonal and needs to be regulated. However, we observed that three homestays, viz., Jari Guest House, Apna Sapna and Misty Mouth Homestays, which were not approved by Department of Tourism, were found to be operating in pristine shola forests of Jagara Valley and their activities were not regulated in spite of specific direction from NTCA.

- ❖ The Tiger Conservation Plan of Dandeli-Anshi TR had identified that resorts and homestays are a threat and challenge to the TR. However, it can be seen from **Table 5.3** that six unapproved homestays were operational without approval of Department of Tourism. Forest Department has not taken action to regulate or close the homestays in this Reserve.

Recommendation 6: Forest department in coordination with Department of Tourism, needs to regulate activities of resorts / hotels / homestays, etc., in and around Protected Areas.

5.3.3 Coffee Plantations within the core / critical tiger habitat of Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve

Five coffee plantations *i.e.*, Attikan, Biligiri Rangan, Emerald Haven, Nilgiri and Honna Metti Estates, are present in the core area / critical tiger habitat of the BRT Tiger Reserve. These plantations are functioning on leased lands and are using the forest roads for transportation of timber and labourers and creating pressure on Tiger Reserve which is not conducive for wildlife conservation.

Forest land of 184 *acres* in Doddasampige Reserve Forest was granted (August 1946) on lease for 20 years to Mr R C Morris for coffee cultivation which was transferred (January 1955) to M/s Nilgiri Plantations, owned by M/s Birla Brothers Ltd., Calcutta along with additional 15 acres of Reserve Forest land. Before expiry of lease period (1966) and consequent upon reorganisation of States in November 1956, the forest land where this plantation area is located came under the jurisdiction of State of Karnataka. The Company claimed that the erstwhile Government of Mysore had further extended the lease period by 99 years. However, copy of Government approval in extending lease period was neither furnished by the Company nor available with the Department. However, forest land continued to be under occupation by the Company and Department demanded lease rent despite being aware of the fact that lease agreement was not concluded and Government approval in extending lease period was not available on record. The Department should have taken action to get forest land resumed back as the area was situated in the core area of the Tiger Reserve area but instead demanded lease rent which was injudicious and questionable. The demanding of lease rent was tantamount to regularisation of illegal occupation and thus favouring the Company.

On this being pointed out, Government in Exit conference (March 2017) stated that the matter is in court and legal action would be taken to resume the land back to the Department.