

# **JAMMU AND KASHMIR ECOTOURISM POLICY**

(Draft -2017)

## **1. PREAMBLE**

Ecotourism is defined as "*Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves environment and improves well-being of local people.*" (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015). Such tourism is low-impact, educational, and directly beneficial to local communities. Most popular tourist destinations in the State are fragile ecosystems that provide a host of ecosystem services to local residents and people living downstream. Unplanned tourism can destroy the very environment that attracts the tourists. Ecotourism promotes non-consumptive use of wilderness areas, for the benefit of local communities living around, and dependent on, these fragile landscapes.

The basic principle of ecotourism is to integrate conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. Practice of ecotourism essentially involves following elements:

- Low-impact tourism that protects ecological integrity of wilderness areas, secures wildlife values of the destination and its surrounding areas
- Highlights heritage value of wilderness and protected areas
- Promotes environmental and cultural awareness
- Facilitates sustainability of ecotourism activities
- Provides livelihood opportunities to local communities
- Uses indigenous, locally produced and ecologically sustainable materials for tourism activities

Ecotourism has been included as one of the strategies in the J&K State Forest Policy, 2011 under section 4.13 which reads as follows:

*"Jammu and Kashmir has immense potential for eco-tourism which provides basic framework for ecologically sustainable tourism with livelihood opportunities for local communities. Following actions will be taken to promote and popularise eco-tourism in the State:*

- a. *Eco-tourism activities will be regulated in a manner that preserves the health, scenic beauty and natural attributes of the eco-tourism sites.*
- b. *Local communities will be trained and motivated to be an integral part of the eco-tourism activities.*
- c. *Eco-tourism will compulsorily focus on providing eco-sustainable livelihood support to the local communities."*

## **2. VISION**

The vision of eco-tourism policy is to protect aesthetic landscapes in the State by regulating tourism in an ecologically sustainable manner, and to provide livelihood opportunities to local communities through ecotourism.

## **3. OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of the J&K Ecotourism Policy are as follows:

- a. To provide common platform for promoting ecotourism and to lay down framework for its growth in an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable manner.
- b. To provide livelihood opportunities to local communities through ecotourism and to secure their involvement in conservation of natural resources.
- c. To develop and enforce standards and norms for ecotourism activities.
- d. To ecologically restore already existing popular tourist destinations which have suffered environmental degradation over a period of time.

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- e. To regulate tourism activities in a manner that maintains ecological and cultural integrity of the area and communities.
- f. To ensure compliance of existing laws, rules and regulations pertaining to forest, wildlife and environmental conservation.
- g. To create awareness about local culture and traditions.

#### 4. **STRATEGY**

The stated objectives would be achieved through following strategies:

**4.1 Conservation of ecology:** Conservation of ecology is paramount for sustainable ecotourism. Ecotourism activities must conform to the need for preserving natural attributes of tourist destinations. Proper waste disposal, regulation of vehicles/ tourists in accordance with carrying capacity, control of noise pollution and biodiversity conservation are pre-requisites for any ecotourism activity and this can be achieved by strict adherence to Forest, Wildlife and Environmental laws.

**4.2 Capacity building:** To provide ecologically sustainable livelihood support to local communities, their orientation, education and training is a pre requisite. This would involve the following:

- a. Training of local communities in different ecotourism activities like guides for trekking, bird watching, nature interpretation, hospitality and skill development in income generating activities.
- b. Training of frontline staff, tour operators, ecotourism societies and other stakeholders in different aspects of eco-tourism with focus on environmental conservation and enforcement of environmental regulations.



**4.3. Ecotourism activities:** Ecotourism activities to be promoted at any destination can be broadly classified into three categories, viz. educational, adventure and recreational.

- a. **Educational:** One of the objectives of ecotourism is to create awareness among tourists about nature, environmental conservation and cultural heritage. This objective can be achieved by having properly trained guides, nature interpretation centers and proper sign boards.
- b. **Adventure:** Ecotourism provides many possibilities for adventure activities like trekking, camping, rock climbing, river rafting etc. However, some of these activities require collaboration with experts.
- c. **Recreational:** Spending time in the solitude of natural surroundings is invigorating, especially for those leading stressful urban life. Activities like nature trails, nature camps and home-stays provide tourists with an opportunity to be one with nature.

**4.4 Compliance with existing Laws, rules and regulations:**

All activities in forest and wildlife areas shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the provisions of J&K Forest Act 1930, J&K Forest (Conservation) Act 1997, and J&K (Wildlife) Protection Act 1978. Strict compliance with waste rules notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the provisions of J&K State Non-biodegradable Material (Management and Disposal) Act, 2007, shall be ensured.

**4.5 Awareness and Publicity**

- a. Existing nature interpretation facilities shall be enriched to accommodate requirements of various classes of visitors.
- b. Conservation ethics should be promoted in and around each destination for creating awareness amongst students, local communities, and visitors to maintain and support ecotourism and environmental conservation.



- c. Awareness efforts would involve media campaigns, formation of eco-clubs in schools and colleges, displays and hoardings, community centers etc.

**4.6 Management:** For effective management and regulation of ecotourism activities, and compliance with prevailing laws and regulations, a two tier administrative framework comprising of Ecotourism Coordination Committee at the state level and Project Implementing Agencies at the ground level shall be constituted.

The Ecotourism Coordination Committee shall be headed by Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and shall include representatives from the Wildlife Department, J&K State Pollution Control Board, Tourism Department, and Rural & Urban Local Bodies.

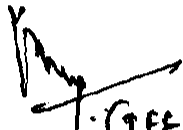
The 'Project Implementation Agencies (PIA) shall be constituted for each site or cluster of sites. The primary criterion for selection of locations with ecotourism potential would be willingness of local communities to take up ecotourism as one of their livelihood activities. The PIA's shall be registered as societies under J&K Societies Registration Act, 1998 (CE 1941) and also with the CCF Ecotourism. Their role and responsibility shall be prescribed by the Government in consultation with the Ecotourism Coordination Committee. The Project Implementing Agency will be headed by the Conservator of Forests/ Regional Wildlife Warden concerned and shall include representatives from local administration as well as other stake holders and independent experts.


**4.7 Impact assessment studies, research and guidelines:**

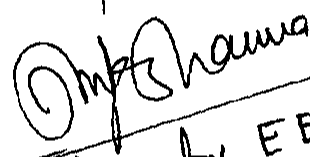
- a. Impact assessment studies would be carried out at periodic intervals so as to ascertain impacts of eco-tourism on environment and remedial measures taken.
- b. The carrying capacity and type of activities shall be determined for various eco-tourism locations.

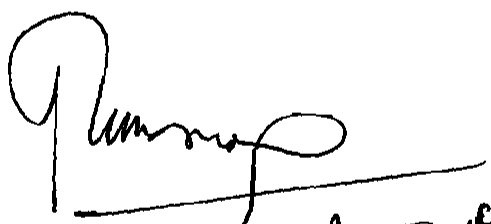


- c. A set of guidelines would be issued for educating tourists to inculcate the eco-tourism spirit, to minimize use of resources for recreation and protection of nature.
- d. Continuous research shall be taken up on various facets of eco-tourism to minimize negative impacts and for application of latest eco-restoration techniques and technologies. Subject matter specialists, non-government organizations and other stakeholders shall be involved in such studies.

  
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