

Wayanad Ready to Play Host to Tigers

by Anil S

Kochi: A rich tiger population and proximity to other national wildlife sanctuaries like Nagarhole, Bandipur and Mudumalai are proving to be highly advantageous for Wayanad in its race for a tiger reserve.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has expressed its willingness to consider a tiger reserve in Wayanad, provided a proposal comes from the Kerala government. However, the state government is yet to take a final decision.

Officials are of the view that there is nothing wrong in sending a proposal.

"The state can always send

a proposal to make Wayanad a tiger park. It's for the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the MoEF to give the approval," said Principal Chief Conservator of Forests R Raja Raja Varma.

In terms of geographic patterns and population, Wayanad qualifies for a tiger reserve.

"In fact the flourishing population of wild cats in Wayanad is much better compared to many other places in the country. Even the latest census has shown that the district has about 70 tigers, which is much higher than many other tiger reserves in the country," said O P Kaler, Chief Conser-



vator of Forests.

Certain geographic criteria including a specific area of core and buffer zone, are mandatory to be declared as a tiger reserve. However, it will not be applicable to Wayanad, as there is a continuity of other national

parks. "Since Wayanad shares boundaries with other parks like Nagarhole, Bandipur and Mudumalai, the area of core and buffer regions won't be a criterion," officials said.

Opposition from locals, as Wayanad has the highest

rate of human-wildlife conflict, could be one reason why the government has not been pressing for a tiger reserve.

"Already there are increasing incidents of man-animal conflicts. This could be one reason why there has been no move to propose a tiger reserve there," sources said. The state, which already has two tiger parks, the Periyar Tiger Reserve and Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary, has got a positive response on getting a third tiger reserve from the NTCA. Now it is for the state government to take the final call.

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