

Plan to conserve snow leopard

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NEW DELHI, Nov 7 — The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has chalked out a model scheme for conservation of snow leopard throughout the Himalayan zones.

The ministry has identified 14 protected areas for setting up snow leopard reserves. Under the scheme, Karakoram wildlife sanctuary, Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary, Hemis National Park and Kishtwar national Park (Jammu and Kashmir), Pin National Park, Dupi Bhabha Wildlife Sanctuary, Great Himalayan National Park, and Sanawar Wildlife Sanctuary (Himachal Pradesh), Nanda Devi National Park, Govind Pashy Vihar and Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh), Khangchendzonga National Park (Sikkim), Moiling National Park and Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary (Arunachal Pradesh).

The snow leopard is confined to the Himalayas from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh. It has been declared as an endangered animal throughout the world, including India. It is found in about 98,000 sq kms in the country. The number of snow leopards has been dwindling year after year before the scheme was mooted as the small protected areas could not provide protection to this rare species.

The scheme aims at halting the forces of destruction and restoring and maintaining healthy balance in the country's northern mountain eco-systems. It has, therefore, been decided to protect and restore the entire eco-system of co-predators, herbivores, plants and soils, to conserve this magnificent animal. This network includes a system

of pastoralism and other human activities in proper balance with wild flora and fauna. However, the number of the components of this system would be controlled as to prevent them exerting a negative influence inimical to the conservation of nature.

Additional reserves would also be created later to build up a comprehensive network, encompassing more habitat types and a greater number of population of some of the greatly endangered species. The creation of these 14 reserves at the initiation of the scheme would provide a basic coverage of good protected areas. In addition to snow leopard, each reserve would have other wildlife species, many of them are endemic to a particular part of the Himalayan range and are as endangered as snow leopard.

Under the scheme, six of the proposed reserves have already received Central assistance. The Central grants would cover 100 per cent of non-recurring costs in all areas brought under the aegis of the scheme and 50 per cent of the recurring costs in the case of national parks.

The ministry would also give advice and overall direction of the scheme to the state authorities. However, the execution would be carried out by the forestry and wildlife authorities of the five states. The scheme would help in eliminating all destructive influences in these habitats, including excessive grazing and trampling by domestic stock, firewood collection, poaching and unwise invasion of road builders and tourists. The schemes would also promote scientific study of the Himalayan flora and fauna.