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## Critical wildlife habitat report soon

CHENNAI: In keeping with the provisions of the Schedule Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, the State forest department is in the process of finalising a report on the Critical Wildlife Habitats (CWH) in Tamil Nadu.

The Tamil Nadu government constituted a State Level Committee headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden for identifying CWHs in the State in April 2008.

The exercise had the twin objectives of recognising the rights of tribals besides ensuring conservation of wildlife in tune with the stipulations in the Forest Act besides the Wild Life Act.

On the basis of the recommendations of the State Level Committee, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) will notify the CWHs.

CWHs are areas critical for the survival and growth of wildlife. Once notified, they cannot be used or diverted for any other purpose as per Section 4(2) of the Forest Act.

The high level panel that also has a representative of the MoEF has met a couple of times and the field level surveys are in the final stages. A report to the State government on CWHs is likely soon.

Field studies: The State forest department has completed surveys on CWHs in most regions but for a few, including Kanyakumari. A key aspect is identification of settlements of tribals and other traditional forest dwellers besides demarcation of geographical regions (CWHs) to maintain a healthy population of wildlife and other floral and faunal species to conserve biodiversity. In many places, tribals live inside or close to the periphery of wildlife sanctuaries. In Kanyakumari district alone there are about 50 settlements of Kani tribals. As far as possible, the human inhabited areas will be excluded from the purview of CWH.

The forest dwellers will be resettled only if it is absolutely necessary for conserving wildlife according to the process set in the Forest Act. Soon, alongside the notification of CWHs, efforts are afoot to confer land rights on tribals (could range between two and four hectares based on the extent of usage), which they have traditionally been using in forests for bonafide livelihood purposes.

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