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NOTIFICATION

No. B. 12015/4/2016-FST, the 9th June, 2017. In order to provide recreation and promote understanding about heritage sites and its values, nature and wildlife conservation with income generation and employment opportunity to local people while according priority to bio-diversity conservation, ecosystem functioning and socio-economic development, the Governor of Mizoram is pleased to notify the "Mizoram Eco-Tourism Policy" as enclosed.

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Principal Secretary to the Govt. of Mizoram,
Environment, Forests & Climate Change Department.

MIZORAM ECO-TOURISM POLICY

1. Background:

The state of Mizoram, endowed with numerous beautiful hill ranges covered with forest, rivers and streams between the hills, coupled with its rich natural and cultural heritage provides unique opportunities for ecotourism. Mizoram has about 88.93% of its land covered with forests (SFR 2015) that supports various species of mammals, birds, reptiles, more than 2500 species of plants including 253 species of orchids (BSI, Shillong) and more than 300 species of medicinal plants. The rich biodiversity of the state is conserved mainly through a network of protected areas comprising of 2 National Parks and 8 Sanctuaries complemented by wilderness areas, community conserved village forest areas, wetlands and other forest areas.

Ecotourism or Ecologically Sustainable Tourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local communities. It is one of the tools whereby people are encouraged to visit natural forests to promote action to conserve it. Ecotourism offers an opportunity to showcase the state's unique natural and associated cultural heritage to visitors while enhancing the livelihood options for the local people. Ecotourism is globally identified as a means of achieving twin goals of bio diversity conservation and sustainable development. Both short-term goals and long term goals can be achieved without sacrificing one's own interests.

Ecotourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness, adventures, and environmental protection. The most significant feature of the ecotourism industry is its capacity to generate employment opportunities, particularly in remote and under developed area. It offers enormous potential for utilizing natural resources like landscapes, mountains, bio-diversity areas, rivers etc for the benefit of people. Ecotourism is the best way to enjoy nature's charisma without harming it and for the admiration of nature's marvels.

Mizoram, the land of hills offers several tourist destinations that not just de-stress but also rejuvenate people. There are several ways to enjoy Mother Nature in the most pristine way. Places like Phawngpui (Blue Mountain), Pala lake, Vantawngkhawhthla, Reiektlang, Hmuifang, Lungkulh, Serlui dam, etc in Mizoram are some of the places where you can enjoy the treasured wealth of mother nature.

2. Vision:

The vision of the policy is to preserve and protect the natural heritage, both flora and fauna of Mizoram and attract tourists and visitors from outside and inside the State through low impact community based ecotourism; and in the bargain provide opportunities to enhance livelihood of the local people and at the same time generate revenue for the sustainable development of its resources. The Ecotourism Policy would encourage a partnership between the civil society (local communities, NGOs, academic institutions and private enterprises/businesses) and the State Government (Forests, Tourism and other sister Departments).

3. Mission:

The mission is to provide recreation and promote understanding about heritage sites and its values, nature and wildlife conservation with income generation and employment opportunity to local people while according priority to bio-diversity conservation, ecosystem functioning and socio-economic development.

4. Objectives:

To achieve the above mission, the Policy seeks to pursue the following objectives:

- i) Identify and promote/develop ecotourism potential sites in Mizoram.
- ii) Create and promote awareness and understanding about sustainable and responsible ecotourism among the stakeholders such as the general public, local communities, voluntary organizations and Government officials.
- iii) Promote coordination among partner Departments to further the cause of ecotourism and establish mechanism for partnership between all stakeholders to develop and promote sustainable community based ecotourism.
- iv) Identify and develop standards and norms for permissible and ecologically sound ecotourism activities in tandem with the principles of community based ecotourism with the benefits accruing to the local community in terms of income as well as employment generation.
- v) Build capacity of stakeholders towards natural and cultural heritage interpretation, hospitality, management of tourist traffic.
- vi) Conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems, sites of heritage value, cultural and traditional heritage of the local community and generate incentives to local communities for nature conservation.

5. Key Principles of Mizoram Ecotourism

The planning, development, management and promotion of ecotourism in the State of Mizoram shall be governed by the following guiding principles.

- a. Conserve nature, biodiversity and ecosystems and also respect the culture, traditions and customs of the local communities in Mizoram.
- b. Adhere to international and national ecotourism principles, guidelines and standards, and also the existing environment, forest and wildlife laws and management/ working plan prescriptions for the development of ecotourism in the PAs and forest areas of Mizoram.
- c. Actively involve the local communities in ecotourism activities and generate incentives or income sources for such local communities, preferably for the economically disadvantaged families to enhance their economic conditions.
- d. Promote sustainable use of natural, cultural and local resources to develop and promote ecotourism in the state with the emphasis on the use of renewable energy.
- e. Facilitate coordination and partnership for planning, implementation of ecotourism activities with key stakeholders such as local communities, NGOs, government organizations, local entrepreneurs like home stay operators and tour operators.
- f. Encourage visitors to learn about biodiversity and ecosystems as well as local people's cultural and traditional values.

6. Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board, Executive committee of Mizoram Eco-development Board and Village Ecotourism Development Committee.

The Environment, Forests & Climate Change Department, Government of Mizoram will be the Nodal Department to promote ecotourism in Mizoram. The department shall constitute an apex body to be known as the Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board.

The functions of the Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board will be:-

- i. To facilitate ecotourism projects compatible with this policy.
- ii. Develop and enforce standards and norms for promotion and implementation of ecotourism destinations, based on specific studies conducted.
- iii. Establish partnerships between various government departments, local communities and other stakeholders.
- iv. To develop/modify policy and guidelines governing eco-tourism to meet the challenges in changing times.
- v. To ensure adequate funding for eco-tourism projects in the State.
- vii. Facilitate education, research, monitoring and evaluation of the ecotourism activities.

The Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board shall have an executive body known as Executive Committee of the Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board.

The functions of the committee will be

- i. To Identify and prioritize ecotourism destinations/sites throughout the State.
- ii. To promote community based ecotourism enterprises in protected areas and other potential destinations through "Ecotourism Development Committees which will be constituted at the village level" or through already existing "Eco-Development Committees or Joint Forest Management Committees" whichever is suitable to the particular area.

- iii. Awareness raising and capacity building of various stakeholders.
- iv. To effectively implement standards and norms for promotion of ecotourism activities in the State.
- v. Undertake education, research, monitoring and evaluation of the ecotourism activities in the State.
- vi. To effectively implement decisions taken by State Ecotourism Development Board.

The Environment, Forests & Climate Change Department, Government of Mizoram will also constitute a field unit of ecotourism known as Ecotourism Development Committee in respect of each of the ecotourism sites with representatives drawn from various Government departments, local bodies and NGOs.

Mandate of the Ecotourism Development Committee

- a. To oversee the working of the Ecotourism Strategy with respect to the concerned area.
- b. To execute and implement the ecotourism project in respect of the concerned area approved by the Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board through the Forest Development Agency concerned.
- c. To ensure that whole or a part of revenue generated from ecotourism activity flows back to the local community.

Already established Eco-development committees or Joint Forest Management Committees may be revamped to function as Village Eco-tourism development committees at places wherever possible.

7. Strategy

The objectives of the policy as stated above would be achieved through the following strategies:-

A. Identification of Projects and sites

- i. Potential ecotourism sites within Protected Areas and other forest areas and non-forest areas will be identified by the Department of EF&CC and Tourism which will be prioritized for phased development.
- ii. The criteria for selection of the project site would be its nearness or connectivity with tourist destination/cities and towns, its economic viability and enthusiasm and willingness of the local communities to preserve its nature and heritage.

B. Publicity, awareness and education on Ecotourism

- i. Awareness and educational programmes on ecotourism including nature based activities, environment conservation, waste management, etc will be organized for Government officials, local communities, NGOs, school children, etc.
- ii. Ecotourism destinations in Mizoram will be promoted and publicized through various print and electronic media including internet portals.
- iii. Maps of ecotourism sites and activities will be developed showing sites to visit, distance, time required, geographical features, altitudes, available services, local rules, etc.

C. Coordination with partner Departments and stakeholders

- i. Coordination and partnership between line Departments such as EF&CC, Tourism, LAD, Art and Culture, Fisheries, Sports & Youth Services, Industries, etc and other local stakeholders like Village Ecotourism Committees, other community based organizations (CBO), Village Councils, NGOs, etc. will be established to steer and coordinate the development and management of community based ecotourism and to develop ecotourism business in a fair trade manner.

- ii. Meetings, workshops, seminars, events will be held to discuss and deliberate on ecotourism activities and achievements with participation of key stakeholders including key government organizations.

D. Identification of ecotourism activities

Ecotourism activities to be identified and developed at any destination shall be site-specific i.e. dependent upon the potential of the particular site being developed and shall be taken up in such a way as to affect least disturbance to the natural beauty of the site. Development and improvement of infrastructure and facilities within protected areas (PA) and other potential forest areas outside PAs should be the function of Chief Wildlife Warden and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests respectively in accordance with the prevailing rules and regulations governing forests and wildlife while destination development in the peripheral locations outside the PAs and forest areas can be carried out by Tourism Department. Structures with exotic look causing visual pollution and non-compatible and unaesthetic architectures should be avoided. Further, in and around historically important places where eco-tourism promotion is identified to be promoted, the same may be implemented without disturbing the original value, shape and beauty.

Following are some of the activities and facilities that may be undertaken for promoting an area as an ecotourism destination in Mizoram.

Activities

- i) Trekking and Nature Walks.
- ii) Wildlife spotting and Bird watching
- iii) Angling
- iv) Adventure sports like rock climbing, rappelling, parasailing, boating, river rafting, etc
- v) Nature photography tour
- vi) Nature painting workshop
- vii) Botanical excursion

Facilities

- i) Nature Camps including day visitor centers.
- ii) Eco-friendly Accommodation including home stays.
- iii) Visitor Interpretation Centers and Nature Education.
- iv) Amphitheatre.
- v) Nature shops.
- vi) Herbal Ecotourism with sale outlets.
- vii) Urban ecotourism through eco-parks.
- viii) Wayside amenities like public conveniences, garbage disposal facilities, observation towers with telescope and binoculars, adequate signage, wayside exhibits, etc.
- ix) Other facilities for any other eco-friendly activities may also be provided based on specific requirements of a site provided the activity is compatible with the overall objectives of this policy and in conformance with the various standards and guidelines laid down in this regard.

E. Ecotourism Management Plan

- i. Preparation of Ecotourism Management Plan/Project will be mandatory for setting up of any ecotourism destination or eco-resort. After selection of potential ecotourism site to be developed, Ecotourism Development Committee for the site (village) will be formed. The Committee will

then prepare the Ecotourism Management Plan/Project for the selected site after carrying out micro-planning exercise for approval of the Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board. Ecotourism Management Plan/Project will be prepared and submitted as per the guideline or format approved by the Government.

F. Training and capacity building

- i. Training and capacity building will be imparted to staff of EF&CC, Tourism and various stake holders such as eco-tourism entrepreneurs, hoteliers and other service providers, etc. for effective management of eco-tourism in the State.
- ii. Training and capacity building will also be provided to local communities who wish to engage in ecotourism activities. The topics of the training and capacity building may include environmental education, basic forest and wildlife laws and regulations, waste management, home stay management, eco-tour programming, interpretation, first aid, flora and fauna photography, angling, hospitality, business management, communication skills, etc.

G. Promotion of ecotourism product

- i. Local communities will be encouraged to produce local handicrafts and other local souvenirs on a sustainable manner with minimum impacts on the ecosystem.
- ii. Village ecotourism for different target groups (i.e. for adults, children, family, students, etc) may also be developed and promoted in potential villages after carrying out micro planning exercises.
- iii. Environment or eco-friendly lodges managed by either local individuals or local communities will be encouraged in or near wilderness areas.
- iv. Interpretation Centers will be encouraged in towns and villages which will also function as Ecotourism Promotion Centers.

H. Research and monitoring

- i. Research and monitoring will be carried out to see the impact and effectiveness of policy implementation, and the future development of ecotourism will be determined by environmental impact assessment, socio-economic evaluation and its contribution to environmental conservation as well as the extent of availability of benefits to the local community.
- ii. Emphasis will be given on monitoring of the visitors impact on the environment and local communities, carrying capacity of visitors and the conservation message conveyed to visitors.
- iii. Research will focus on inventory of biodiversity, generating new knowledge, insights and modalities for sustainable ecotourism.

I. Financial support and fund mobilization

- i. For the promotion and development of ecotourism in Mizoram, the Department of EF&CC or the Mizoram Ecotourism Development Board may find ways and/or arrange to provide funds for the same through grants from the Central Government or any funding sources/agencies and/or through PPP mode.
- ii. In addition, the nodal Department may devise a mechanism for generation of viable revenues to bridge the financial gap to the extent possible through sources from entry for visitors, camera fee, vehicle entry/parking fee, toilet fee for day visitors, charges for any other activities, etc.
- iii. The general development of Protected Areas including Eco-tourism facilities, Interpretation Centres, Literature and the like would continue with funding support under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes, CAMPA, based on site specific proposals submitted by the concerned authority.
- iv. The village level Ecotourism Development Committees may be registered with the concerned revamped Forest Development Agencies as a mechanism to receive donations/contributions nationally as well as internationally.

J. SAFETY MEASURES

- i. Training on first aid, methods of risk management, etc may be imparted to tour operators, guides, etc whose clients may have accidents and injuries caused during tourism activities.
- ii. The entry of tourist within the ecotourism zone shall be regulated within permissible limit.
- iii. A system of notifying landslide prone areas, accident prone areas and other dangerous places for visitors shall be put in place.
- iv. A system of emergency call for medical doctors on event of visitors' sickness or injuries shall also be arranged.
- v. The Ecotourism Management Plan/ Project should establish standards for development and refurbishing of infrastructure, waste/sewage disposal, control of litter and optimum use of the fragile ecosystem so as to have low impact on the environment.
- vi. Regulatory measures to ensure tourist flow within the carrying capacity of the eco-tourism site, Social, cultural and environmental sustainability, as well as safety and security of tourists and visitors shall be introduced.

GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Ecotourism Operators, Guides, Visitors and Research Scholars

- (I) Eco-tourism operators shall register themselves with the State Department for engaging in eco-tourism activities in the State and shall abide by all the rules, regulations and policy guidelines in force. In case of any violation, their registration is liable to be cancelled and will be subjected to any penalized action recommended as per the relevant acts and rules in force.
- (II) Ecotourism Operators, Guides Visitors and Research Scholars shall
 - a. engage trekking service providers who are genuine Mizoram subjects and possess the certificate of identification;
 - b. ensure that fair wages are paid according to the prescribed rates;
 - c. provide adequate cooked food for the trekking service providers while in a wildlife area and ensure that they do not use firewood;
 - d. obtain a permit and pay prescribed fees before entering a forest/wildlife area;
 - e. arrange to carry sufficient kerosene and LPG for heating and cooking purpose;
 - f. segregate degradable and non-degradable litters and burn or bury all biodegradable items and carry back all other non-degradable items;
 - g. keep to the permitted nature trails and treks;
 - h. inform the nearest wildlife check post, in case the parties come across forest fire, wildlife offence, death/carcass of wild animals during their nature trip;
 - i. carry medical first aid kits as may be required during the trip;
- (III) Ecotourism Operators, Guides, Visitors and Research Scholars shall not
 - a. use firewood or kindle fire or throw cigarettes butts in wildlife and forest areas;
 - b. damage or cut shrubs or thickets;
 - c. pollute water body;
 - d. collect plants or their parts;
 - e. bring with them dogs, cats and other pet animals;
 - f. feed, shout, tease, chase, disturb or molest wild animals;
 - g. play loud music or use loud speakers;
 - h. camp outside the designated campsites;

- i. trek outside of the designated natural trails;
- j. defecate within 100 meters of any water body;
- k. camp within 500 meters of the periphery of any lake;
- l. defile sites of religious and cultural significance such as sacred monuments, lakes, rocks and caves especially by inscribing names, using paint etc;
- m. commit any other act that may be injurious to forests, water bodies, plants, animals or disturb the natural tranquility of such sites or become a nuisance to other trekkers;
- n. leave any non-biodegradable materials in wildlife area during a trek, and such materials shall be declared at the forest/wildlife checkpost both before and after the entry;
- o. carry out any research study or study within forest/wildlife area without the prior permission of the competent authority;
- p. indulge in hunting of any animals or carry on the business of buying and selling any animals, animal articles, antique cultural artifacts, trophy, uncured trophy or meat of wild animals and specified plants;
- q. destroy or remove any wildlife, infrastructures and plants/trees, sign boards of the protected areas;
- r. swim in lakes, rivers or approach glaciers inside the National Park/Protected Areas or camp in areas of wildlife interest or their habitats;
- s. collect specimens of wildlife without permission of the competent authority.