

## Gharial, Sloth Bear to be Covered Under Centre's Scheme for Critically Endangered Species

The recommendation by the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL) recommended including the Gharial and Sloth Bear in the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH) to enhance their conservation through focused programs.

This scheme provides financial and technical support to states for habitat restoration, anti-poaching, and human-wildlife conflict mitigation. While the gharial is critically endangered, the sloth bear faces threats to localized populations, though it is not nationally listed as critically endangered.

### Key points of the SCNBWL recommendation

- **Inclusion into the Species Recovery Programme**

- **Official Entry:** The recommendation from the SCNBWL, chaired by the Union Environment Minister, adds the two species to the central government's critical species list for focused conservation.
- **Programme Details:** The Species Recovery Programme is a component of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme–Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH), which focuses on saving critically endangered species and their habitats.
- **Funding:** The programme will receive financial support through funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA).

- **Gharial conservation**

- **Conservation status:** Despite decades of conservation efforts since the 1970s, the gharial remains Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and is listed under Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- **Major threats:** The freshwater river habitats of gharials are threatened by sand mining, pollution, riverbed farming, and the construction of dams and barrages.

- **Conservation plans:** Focused efforts will be renewed, particularly for ex-situ hatchling rearing and release to boost the wild population. The initiative will also benefit other crocodylians like muggers and saltwater crocodiles.
- **Sloth bear conservation**
  - **Conservation status:** While abundant in some areas, the sloth bear is listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN and is included in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Certain local populations are severely threatened.
  - **Major threats:** The bears face threats from habitat fragmentation due to infrastructure and mining projects, and are frequently involved in human-wildlife conflict.
  - **Conflict mitigation:** The recovery plan will address the increasing human-sloth bear conflicts, particularly in central and western India, by including comprehensive mitigation strategies endorsed by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

## Explanation of Exam Oriented Key Terms

01

### The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) functions as the project-clearing body for wildlife-related conservation matters, assessing projects affecting forest land, boundaries of protected areas, and wildlife habitats, operating under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Its key points are: mandated by the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, it holds the delegated power to grant or reject project approvals, though these recommendations are ultimately advisory to the Union government.

#### Legal basis and constitution

- **Statutory foundation:** The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is a statutory body constituted by the Central Government under Section 5A of the Wild Life (Protection) Act (WLPA), 1972.

- **Formation of Standing Committee:** The NBWL, at its discretion, can form a Standing Committee as per Section 5B of the WLPA, 1972. This committee is delegated powers by the main NBWL to act on its behalf.

## Composition and structure

- **Chairperson:** The Union Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change chairs the Standing Committee.
- **Members:** It consists of the Vice-Chairperson (the Environment Minister), the Member-Secretary, and up to ten members. These members are nominated by the Vice-Chairperson from among the members of the larger NBWL.
- **Meetings:** The committee meets more frequently than the full NBWL, typically every three months, to ensure swifter decision-making on project proposals.

## Core functions

The primary function of the Standing Committee is to serve as a project clearance body, evaluating and recommending development projects that could impact wildlife habitats.

- **Project appraisal:** It appraises projects that require diversion of forest land or affect Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries) and Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs). This includes projects for highways, railway lines, and other linear infrastructure.
- **Habitat diversion:** As per Section 35(6) of the WLPA, it must evaluate proposals to destroy or divert wildlife habitats in national parks.
- **Boundary changes:** Its approval is necessary for any alteration of the boundaries of a Protected Area.
- **Mitigation measures:** The committee can require project proponents to include specific measures to mitigate the environmental impact on wildlife and their habitats, such as constructing animal passages.

02

## Species Recovery Programme (SRP)

The Species Recovery Programme is a government initiative to conserve critically endangered species and their habitats in India. It is funded under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, IDWH, which was initiated in 2008-09.

### Objectives

- **Prevent species extinction:** Recovering the population of critically endangered species and their habitats.
- **Enhance conservation:** Providing financial and technical assistance to states and Union Territories for wildlife conservation.
- **Community participation:** Strengthening conservation efforts through community involvement and raising awareness.
- **Habitat restoration:** Undertaking measures for habitat improvement to ensure the long-term survival of species.

### Features and components

- **Part of IDWH:** The SRP is one of the three components of the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH), along with support for protected areas and protection of wildlife outside protected areas.
- **Focus on critically endangered species:** The program prioritizes species facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.
- **Multi-pronged approach:** SRP utilizes various techniques, including captive breeding, reintroduction, restocking, and intensive management, to recover populations.
- **Collaborative effort:** The program involves multiple stakeholders, including the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), state forest departments, and research institutions like the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).
- **100% central funding:** Conservation plans under the programme are fully funded by the central government.

### Key species under SRP

A total of 22 species have been identified under the SRP for focused conservation efforts. They include:

- **Critically Endangered:** Great Indian Bustard, Hangul (Kashmir Stag), Jerdon's Courser, Malabar Civet, and Northern River Terrapin.
- **Endangered:** Manipur Brow-antlered Deer (Sangai), Gangetic River Dolphin, Red Panda, and Asiatic Lion.
- **Vulnerable:** Snow Leopard, Indian Rhinoceros, Asiatic Lion, and Swamp Deer.
- **Recent additions:** In 2025, the Gharial and Sloth Bear were recommended for inclusion in the program.

## 03

### The Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)

The Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. It provides technical and financial assistance to states for the protection and conservation of wildlife and their habitats across India. The scheme focus on flagship conservation programs, technology, and community involvement.

#### Objectives

- **Wildlife conservation:** The primary aim is to protect and manage wildlife and their habitats, both inside and outside protected areas.
- **Critically endangered species:** It includes recovery programs to save critically endangered species and their habitats. As of early 2025, 22 species have been identified under this program.
- **Biodiversity enhancement:** The scheme supports activities that restore degraded habitats and create new ones to promote biodiversity.
- **Human-wildlife conflict:** It seeks to mitigate conflicts between humans and wildlife.
- **Climate resilience:** By focusing on forest and habitat protection, the scheme also contributes to climate resilience and water security.

- **Community participation:** The program actively involves local communities in conservation efforts and promotes alternative livelihoods to reduce dependency on forest resources.

## Components

The IDWH scheme has three main components:

- **Support to Protected Areas:** Provides financial assistance for the management of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves, and Community Reserves.
- **Protection of Wildlife Outside Protected Areas:** Focuses on conservation efforts in landscapes outside formal protected areas, including critical wildlife corridors.
- **Recovery Programs for Critically Endangered Species:** Supports specific initiatives aimed at the recovery of threatened wildlife.

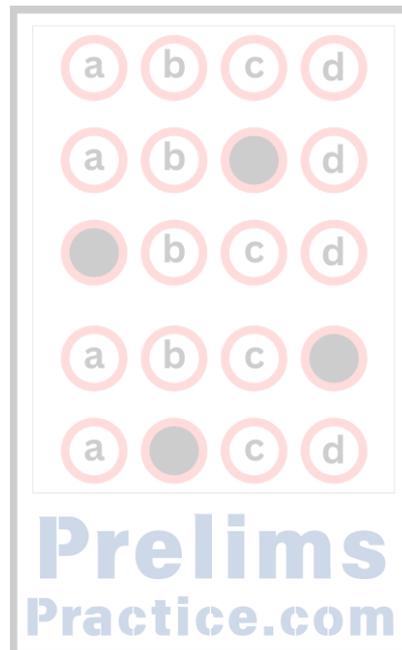
## Sub-components (Flagship projects)

The IDWH acts as an umbrella scheme, encompassing and supporting several major conservation projects:

- **Project Tiger:** Launched in 1973, it focuses on conserving the tiger population within their natural habitats.
- **Project Elephant:** Initiated in 1992, this project addresses the decline in elephant populations due to habitat loss and poaching.
- **Development of Wildlife Habitat (Sub-component):** A broad category that includes specific initiatives like Project Lion, Project Dolphin, and Project Cheetah.
- **Project Dolphin:** Uses advanced technology, like Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) and acoustic monitoring, to track dolphin populations and habitats.
- **Project Lion:** Focuses on the long-term conservation of lions.
- **Project Cheetah:** This initiative has included translocating cheetahs to expand their range.

## Funding

- **Centrally Sponsored Scheme:** Funding is provided by the central government to state and union territory governments.
- **15th Finance Commission Cycle:** The scheme's continuation was approved for the 2021-2026 cycle.
- **Funding pattern:** While a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, the funding ratio can vary. In certain areas like mountainous regions or for specific endangered species, 100% central assistance may be provided.



## Practice Questions:

### 1. Consider the following statements:

**Statement I:** The Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is classified as 'Critically Endangered' under the IUCN Red List, warranting its inclusion in India's Species Recovery Programme (SRP).

**Statement II:** The Species Recovery Programme (SRP) is a key component of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH), aimed at protecting, reviving, and ensuring the long-term survival of critically endangered species and their habitats.

### Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II explains Statement
- b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct but Statement II does not explain Statement I
- c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is not correct
- d) Statement I is not correct but Statement II is correct

**Answer: d**

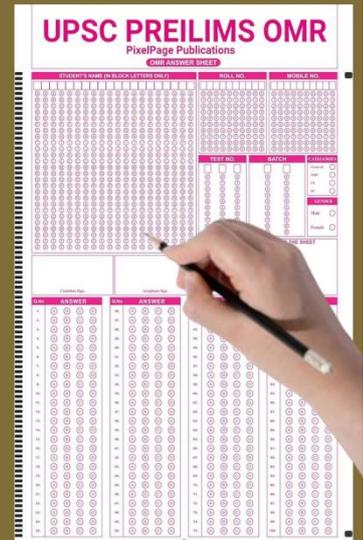
**Explanation: Statement I is incorrect:** The Sloth Bear is classified as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List, not 'Critically Endangered'. It is, however, included in the SRP due to specific regional threats and human-wildlife conflict issues in India. **Statement II is true:** The SRP under the CSS-IDWH scheme does provide financial and technical support for the conservation of critically endangered species.

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