

NTCA Restricts Tiger Corridors to Minimal Pathways

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Tiger Corridors Latest News

- The NTCA has restricted tiger corridors to only the 32 least cost pathways, easing project clearances but raising ecological concerns.

Introduction

- In a major policy shift, the **National Tiger Conservation Authority** (NTCA) has restricted the identification of tiger corridors to only the 32 “least cost pathways” listed in its 2014 report.
- This decision comes less than a month after the NTCA affirmed before the Bombay High Court that tiger corridors should reflect multiple scientific studies and ecological benchmarks.
- While the move simplifies clearances for development projects, it has sparked debate among conservationists, as corridors are essential for tiger movement, genetic diversity, and long-term survival.

Importance of Tiger Corridors

- Tiger corridors are natural linkages connecting tiger reserves and protected areas, allowing safe movement of tigers and other wildlife across fragmented landscapes.
- They help maintain genetic diversity, reduce human-wildlife conflict, and ensure the ecological stability of tiger populations.
- Under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**, projects in or around corridors require approval from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL).

NTCA's Policy Reversal

- In July 2025, NTCA told the Bombay High Court that tiger corridors must be defined using:
 - Protected Areas occupied by tigers.
 - Least cost pathways identified in 2014.
 - Corridors in Tiger Conservation Plans (TCPs).
 - Wildlife Institute of India (WII) studies (2016, 2021).
 - Quadrennial All-India Tiger Estimation (AITE) data.
- However, in August 2025, NTCA issued a clarification narrowing corridors only to:
 - The 2014 least cost pathways.
 - Corridors listed in reserve-specific TCPs.
- This rollback excluded more robust WII studies and AITE-based refinements, surprising experts since NTCA's 2014 report itself had called these corridors a "minimal requirement."

Legal and Judicial Context

- The Bombay High Court is hearing a petition challenging the Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife's April 2025 decision to forward only projects within the least cost pathways for SC-NBWL approval.
- NTCA's sudden clarification, submitted during hearings, has reshaped the case. The Environment Ministry has indicated that further refinement of corridors, based on AITE data, may be delayed until the High Court delivers its ruling.

Scientific Perspectives

- Contemporary research highlights that **limiting corridors to the least cost pathways underestimates the complex movement of tigers**.
- A July 2025 **study by Nagpur's LRC Foundation identified 192 potential corridors across 10 central Indian states**, connecting 30 tiger reserves and around 150 protected areas.
- This dense network demonstrates that multiple pathways, not just the shortest routes, are critical for tiger survival.

Concerns and Criticism

- Conservationists fear that the NTCA's narrowed definition weakens tiger protection at a time when India's tiger population is recovering but facing increasing habitat fragmentation.

- By disregarding updated scientific studies and broad ecological benchmarks, the decision risks undermining the long-term connectivity essential for sustaining viable tiger populations.
- Critics argue that this approach prioritises short-term project clearances over India's global conservation commitments.

Future Outlook

- The issue is likely to remain under judicial scrutiny in the coming months. Conservation scientists are pressing for the incorporation of advanced modelling, telemetry data, and AITE-based evidence in corridor planning.
- With India home to nearly 3,000 tigers, over 70% of the global wild population, the protection of ecological corridors will be crucial to maintaining its conservation success story.

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