

**Field Inspection of Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,  
Madurai Circle, Madurai regarding diversion of 2.839Ha in Valkaradu RF for  
improvement of Theni Bye pass road Theni Forest Division of Madurai Circle.**

Inspected the proposed area earmarked for widening of the existing Bye pass road in Theni district along with District Forest Officer, Theni and field staff on 30.01.2020. The proposal relates to the widening from double lane to multilane and improvements to Theni Bye pass road sanctioned vide G.O. (Ms) No.90, Highways and Minor Ports (HS1) Department dated 28-5-2018.

The said existing Bypass road is a two lane road that connects Dindigul - Theni road to Cochin - Madurai road and cuts Valkaradu RF of Theni forest division in a north - south direction at two distinct places to a length of 278m and 950m respectively. The average width of the existing road is about 7.0m. The present proposal submitted refers to diversion of forest land on either side of the carriageway for widening of the road from double lane to multilane for ease of traffic movement. The total area sought to be diverted is therefore placed at **2.839 ha** of RF, being **0.612 ha** (length of 278m and width of 22.72m = 0.612 ha) in the first stretch and **2.227 ha** (length of 950m and width of 23.44m = 2.227ha) in the second stretch.

Valkaradu RF is situated atop a hillock and slopes down both in a easterly and westerly direction with a common ridge lying in between and running almost the entire length of the RF. The vegetation mostly consists of a coarse form of degraded dense scrub interspersed with Albizzia amara, Chloroxylon swietenia, Neem etc. The Theni district administrative headquarters viz. Theni town has grown around the RF with dwellings occupying the western and southern slopes as well as the eastern slopes adjoining the RF. The Theni bye pass road cuts Valkaradu on its eastern slope and is an important road linking Theni with Dindigul on the north, Cochin on the west as well as Madurai town on the east. It is therefore an important link road for Theni town.

An extent of 8.59ha in SF No.1511 of non forest land in Veerapandi village, Theni Taluk of Theni district has already been handed over to the forest department earlier and has been declared under section 4 of the Tamilnadu Forest Act as stated by the District Forest Officer, Theni vide his Ref. No. 7304/2019/D dated 5-7-2019. This piece of land would constitute the actual land handed over for the purpose of compensatory land for afforestation in lieu of the forest land to be diverted for the above said project.

On perusal of records available with the District Forest Office, Theni, it is seen that the Valkaradu RF was notified under section 16 of Forest Act 1882 in Board of Revenue (Land Revenue) order No. 626 dt. 29.08.1893 and in G.O. No. 717 and 717-A Revenue dt. 10.08.1893.

The existing Theni bye pass road finds no mention in the above notification for Valkaradu RF available with the District forest office. It is presumed that it would have been an old cart track which was subsequently improved upon with the expansion of Theni town without the formal permission of the forest department probably prior to or after the promulgation of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. No action has also been initiated by the Forest Dept. against the Highways Dept, for laying of the Bye pass road or its maintenance. As such the very existence of the present road would have to be construed as a violation of the Forest Conservation Act. It is also fact that one diversion proposal for a stretch of 662 meter of forest land with a width of 12 meter only has been accorded by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests vide Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force) C.No. TS1/34967/2013 dated 27/08/2013. The compensatory land for the above said proposal is to be accommodated within this 8.59 ha of land already handed over by the user agency earlier. However it is a fact that the bye pass road existing in its present form offers much succour to the general public as it is one of the vital roads easing congestion of traffic within Theni town by allowing vehicles entering Theni town to access the bye pass road and reach their destinations without causing traffic snarls in the town. It is therefore a vital link road for a growing urban conglomeration like Theni and its importance in the economic and social development of the inhabitants of the town cannot be underplayed.

The implications of not having obtained clearance under the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 for the existing Bye pass road however will have to be taken into the reckoning.

Presently both stretches of the By-pass road mentioned in the proposal pass through Valkaradu RF and the issue of movement of wildlife in particular smaller mammals and nocturnal ones across the existing road to access the opposite sides of the RF will have to be considered. Movement of heavy and fast moving vehicles on the road can cause disturbance to such wildlife and their habitat and tend to result in road kills as has been witnessed elsewhere. Further trash and garbage deposited by the general public on the sides of the road may also add to the discomfiture experienced by wildlife leading to death of fauna, particularly reptilian fauna.

Under the above circumstances it is proposed that clearance under Forest Conservation Act may be accorded subject to the following:

- The issue of clearance under the existing provisions of the Forest Conservation Act for the bye pass road already in existence and passing through Valkaradu RF will have to be decided.
- The speed of vehicles plying on the road upon expansion of the road may be subjected to regulation preferably not more than 30 km per hour while crossing the stretches of reserve forests on the bye pass road.
- Adequate number of speed breakers may be erected on the stretches of the animal passing through the RF at vantage points to control the speed of vehicles plying on the road.
- Adequate number of Display boards/ Signage may be fixed along both the stretches passing through the RFs warning vehicle drivers to exercise caution while driving.
- Erection of awareness boards /displays exhorting the general public/ vehicle commuters to desist from throwing trash and garbage along the road.



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