

RECOMMENDATION REPORT OF DEPUTY DIRECTOR, SRIVILLIPUTHUR - MEGAMALAI TIGER RESERVE (SMTR), SRIVILLIPUTHUR

The area requested by user agency for construction of steel bridge across streams on the path via Thaniparai to Sundaramahalingam temple is 0.06 ha. The steel bridges are proposed to be constructed in seven locations across Mangani odai, Elumbu odai, Sengili Parai, Palamarathadi odai, Vellaparai odai and one at the entrance and another in front of Sundaramahalingam temple. Out of seven proposed locations former three locations falls inside SMTR, Srivilliputhur and later four locations falls inside temple land bearing survey number S.F .No.517 which is forest in nature.

1. ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE PROPOSED SITE FOR DIVERSION

- a. Part of Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve
- b. Part of Agasthiyar Biosphere Landscape
- c. Part of elephant reserve No. 7
- d. Erstwhile Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary
- e. Temple enclosure excluded from RF notification falls within Eco-sensitive zone.

2. AREA DESCRIPTION AND ITS IMPORTANCE

The Srivilliputhur Megamalai Tiger Reserve (SMTR), Srivilliputhur is situated in the Southern Western Ghats of Tamilnadu and falling in the revenue districts of Virudhunagar and Madurai between North latitude 090 23' 38" to 090 49' 51" N and between longitude 770 21' 51" to 770 47' 20" E. Forest area with an extent of 476.65 Sq Km was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in G.O. Ms. 399 Environment and Forests (FR.V), dated: 26-12-1988 and subsequently it was made a part of SMTR Vide G.O. (Ms) No. 14 Environment and Forests (FR.5) Department, dated: 08.02.2021. SMTR, Srivilliputhur is one of the best habitats for tiger, nilgiri tahr, grizzled squirrel elephant and other rare wildlife (Table 1) in Southern Western Ghats.

Arulmigu Sundaramahalingam temple belonging to Hindu Religious and Empowerment Department is located in Saptur RF of SMTR, Srivilliputhur as enclosure. The area under S.F .No.517 measuring an extent of 63.76 acres (28.80 hect) is being treated as patta of saduragirimahalingasamy temple (Trustee

Kulanthaiyananthasamy) which is under the control of the Hindu Religious and charitable Endowments Board. The enclosure is a part eco-sensitive zone of Grizzledsquirrel Wildlife Sanctuary. This temple is situated at about 900 M above MSL and located 5.5 Km from the entrance of Thaniparai via admitted foot path, out of which 4.75 Km passes through forest area. Every year around 3 lakh pilgrims visit these temples. Public allowed through permitted footpath starting from Thaniparai between 6 AM to 4 PM only on full moon, new moon and Pradosam days. As per the directions of Hon'ble Madurai Bench of Madras High Court in its order dated 27.03.2019 in WP (MD) No. 6400 of 2019, a special committee was formed to fix carrying capacity of the Sanctuay in respect of pilgrims to be permitted to visit Arulmigu Sundaramahalingam. Accordingly, carrying capacity with respect to the temple was fixed at 2778 pilgrims/ day on normal pilgrim days and 15,624 pilgrims /day on special Adi amavasai pilgrim days.

Table1. List of important fauna found Saptur Reserve Forest, Srivilliputhur Megamalai Tiger Reserve, Srivilliputhur

Sl. no	Species	Schedule in Wildlife Protection Act	IUCN conservation Status
1.	Tiger	Schedule I (Part A)	Endangered
2.	Elephant	Schedule I (Part A)	Endangered
3.	Nilgiri Thar	Schedule I (Part A)	Endangered
4.	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	Schedule I (Part A)	Vulnerable
5.	Common Langur	Schedule II (part A)	Least concern
6.	Leopard	Schedule I (Part A)	Vulnerable
7.	Dholes	Schedule I (Part A)	Endangered
8.	Slender Loris	Schedule I (Part A)	Endangered
9.	Indian Gaur	Schedule I (Part A)	Vulnerable
10.	Sambar	Schedule I (Part A)	Vulnerable
11.	Chital	Schedule II (Part A)	Least concern
12.	Jungle Cat	Schedule II (Part A)	Not applicable
13.	Small Indian Civet	Schedule I (Part A)	Least concern
14.	Common Plam Civet	Schedule I (Part A)	Least concern
15.	Brown Palm Civet	Schedule I (Part A)	Least concern
16.	Common Mongoose	Schedule II (Part A)	Least concern
17.	Stripe necked Mongoose	Schedule II (Part A)	Least concern
18.	Sloth Bear	Schedule I (Part A)	Vulnerable
19.	Ruddy mongoose	Schedule II (Part A)	Least concern
20.	Mouse deer	Schedule I (Part A)	Least concern
21.	Barking deer	Schedule I (Part C)	Least concern
22.	Wild pig	Schedule II (Part A)	Least concern
23.	Indian Pangolin	Schedule I (Part A)	Endangered
24.	Star tortoise	Schedule I (Part C)	Vulnerable

25.	Indian Porcupine	Schedule I (Part A)	Least concern
26.	Monitor Lizard	Schedule I (Part A)	Least concern
27.	Changeable hawk eagle	Schedule I (Part B)	Least concerned
28.	Serpent eagle	Schedule I (Part B)	Least concerned
29.	Eagle owl	Schedule I (Part B)	Least concerned
30.	Jungle owlet	Schedule II (Part B)	Least concerned
31.	Indian scops owl	Schedule II (Part B)	Least concerned
32.	Emerald dove	Schedule II (Part B)	Least concerned
33.	Great Indian Hornbills	Schedule I (Part B)	Vulnerable
34.	Peafowl	Schedule I (Part B)	Least concern
35.	Grey jungle fowl	Schedule II (Part II)	Least concern
36.	Spectacled cobra	Schedule I (Part C)	Least concern
37.	Rat snake	Schedule I (Part B)	Least concern
38.	Indian krait	Schedule II (Par-C)	Least concern

3. Description and Nature of the streams

Two non-descript streams, one draining the north western slopes of Saptur beat V and the other draining north eastern slopes of Thaniparai beat merge at the entrance of Sundaramahalingam temple and flow down as Vallaparai odai. Vallaparai odai flows in south-western direction as Sengiliparai odai all along the foot path. Elumbu odai drains south western and south eastern slopes of Thaniparai beat and flows in south western direction to join Sengiliparai odai at the junction of Watrap beat IV, Thaniparai beat and Saptur beat V and flows in south east direction as Mangani odai. All these streams are seasonal in nature that only flows for four to five months in a year during North-East Monsoon and certain times during South-west monsoon. They will not have any flowing surface water during the dry season.

4. Remarks and Recommendations

The proposal has been considered carefully under the provisions of relevant acts, rules, notifications and guidelines. The following remarks and recommendations are offered keeping in mind the impact it has on the ecology and environment in which it is proposed to be implemented along with legal provisions (Table 2).

Table 2. Remarks and recommendations

Sl. no	Steel bridge location	Legal status of land	Remarks and recommendations
1.	Mangani odai Lat 9.711389	Reserve Forest & Tiger	Mangani odai is third order stream its width is about 25 meters; stream bed has huge rocks

	Long 77.629722	Reserve	and small boulders of variable size. PWD officials informed that work involves only pruning of 4 tree branches, wedging, chiseling and benching of bed rock on both the sides of stream. No tree felling is involved. Construction of bridge will not obstruct the flow of stream and help pilgrims and also department staff. Hence, it is recommended to divert 0.009 hectare of forest land for construction of steel bridge in Mangani odai.
2.	Elumbu Odai Lat 9.714722 Long 77.626389	Reserve Forest & Tiger Reserve	Elumbu odai is second order stream; width of this stream is 20 meters. The bed of this stream is also having rocks and small boulders of variable size. The proposed construction involves clearing of bush and drilling. Construction of bridge will not obstruct the flow of stream in any manner and help pilgrims and also department staff. Hence, it is recommended to divert 0.007 hectare of forest land for construction of steel bridge in Elumbu odai
3.	Sangili parai odai Lat 9.716944 Long 77.626667	Reserve Forest & Tiger Reserve	Sangili parai Odai is a second order stream of 30 meters width; bed of this stream is also having rocks and small boulders of variable size. The proposed work involves wedging, chiseling and benching of bed rock on both the sides of stream. It also involves constructions of stairs. Construction of bridge will not obstruct the flow of stream in any manner and help pilgrims and also department staff. Hence, it is recommended to divert 0.011 hectare of forest land for construction of steel bridge in Sangili parai odai.

4.	<p>Palamarathadi odai</p> <p>Lat 9.733611</p> <p>Long 77.648611</p>	<p>Temple enclosure (S.F.No.517) & ESZ</p>	<p>Palamarathadi odai is a small 2nd order stream. Width of the stream is around 20 meters and average depth is 2 meters. To use the existing path, people need not cross this stream to reach the temple and the existing path is in good condition. Construction of this bridge will lead people to undisturbed forest area and after 100 to 125 meter travel again it will bring them back to existing path. This will have negative impact on surrounding ecosystem. Moreover, this area falls within eco-sensitive zone of Grizzled squirrel wildlife sanctuary and Hon'ble Supreme court in its order dated 03.06.2023 in I.A. No.1000 of 2003, in the matter of: writ petition (civil) NO. 202 of 1995 directed that “ (e) <i>In the event any activity is already being undertaken within the one kilometre or extended buffer zone (ESZ), as the case may be, of any wildlife sanctuary or national park which does not come within the ambit of prohibited activities as per the 9th February 2011 Guidelines, such activities may continue with permission of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests of each State or Union Territory and the person responsible for such activities in such a situation shall obtain necessary permission within a period of six months. Such permission shall be given once the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests is satisfied that the activities concerned do not come within the prohibited list and were</i></p>
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5.	Vallaparai odai Lat 9.735278 Long 77.650556	Temple enclosure (S.F.No.517) & ESZ	<p>All these three streams are first order and seasonal streams; falls within eco-sensitive zone of Grizzled squirrel wildlife sanctuary. Water depth in these streams will not reach more than one foot in normal rainy days. Maximum water depth may reach 2- 3 feet during storms and sudden heavy down pour and water flow will come back to normal level within 2 – 3 hours after the rain stops. Moreover, water flows for only 3-4 months in a year and do not have any surface running water during dry seasons. Hence, bridge construction across these three streams is not recommended due to above discussed reasons and direction of Hon'ble Supreme court in its order dated 03.06.2023 in I.A. No.1000 of 2003, in the matter of: writ petition (civil) NO. 202 of 1995 (cited above)</p>
6.	Temple Entrance Lat 9.735556 Long 77.651667	Temple enclosure (S.F.No.517) & ESZ	
7.	Swami sannathi odai Lat 9.734723 Long 77.652381	Temple enclosure (S.F.No.517) & ESZ	

Hence, after carefully consideration in a holistic manner, it is recommended to divert 0.027 hectare of forest land for construction of steel bridge across streams (Mangani odai, Elumbu odai and Sangili Parai only) on the path via Thaniparai to Sundaramahalingam temple against 0.06 hectare proposed by the user agency (as mentioned in table 2) for Forest Clearance under Forest Conservation Act, 1980.


 Deputy Director
 Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve,
 Srivilliputhur Division
 Srivilliputhur