

TAMIL NADU FOREST DEPARTMENT

From
Subrat Mohapatra, I.F.S.,
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
(Head of Forest Force),
Forest Headquarters Building,
Guindy Velachery Main road,
Near Kannikapuram Checkpost,
Guindy, Chennai - 600 032.

To
The Additional Chief Secretary to
Government,
Environment Climate Change and
Forests Department, Secretariat,
Chennai 600 009.

Ref. No. TS4/8098/2022 dated. 28.03.2023

Madam,

Sub: Forests – SMTR, Madurai Circle -Ramanathapuram Division –Proposal for diversion of forest land to an area of 28.6132ha for restoration of Rail connectivity between Rameshwaram and Dhanushkodi in Rameshwaram Reserved Forest in Ramanathapuram District under Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 – Regarding.

- Ref:
1. Online application uploaded by the User Agency – Deputy Chief Engineer, Construction IV, Arsaradi, Madurai(Railways) (FP/TN/RAIL/152033/2022) on 22.03.2022 and revised proposal on 05.08.2022.
 2. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Ref.No: TS4/8098/2022 dated 07.09.2022.
 3. Part-II uploaded by the District Forest Officer, Ramanathapuram on 27.01.2023.
 4. Part-III uploaded by the Conservator of Forest & Field Director, SMTR, Madurai on 15.02.2023
 5. District Forest Officer, Ramanathapuram Division letter. No: 3984/2021 / AD dated 28.01.2023, 20.02.2023 & 15.03.2023.
 6. Conservator of Forests & Field Director, SMTR, Madurai Letter No: 9102 / 2022 / D1 dated 14.02.2023, 21.02.2023 & 17.03.2023

I wish to state that the Deputy Chief Engineer, Construction IV, Arsaradi, Madurai (Railways) has sent a proposal under Section 2 of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for diversion of forest land to an area of 28.6132ha for restoration of Rail connectivity between Rameshwaram and Dhanushkodi in Rameshwaram Reserved Forest in Ramanathapuram District through online web portal in the prescribed format.

2) The User Agency has furnished following Certificates / Undertakings.

- I. Form-A
- II. Letter of Authorisation.
- III. The area to be diverted for this proposal is 28.6132ha in kml file of 5 segments of i)4.6634ha; ii)5.4194ha; iii) 16.9864ha; iv)0.5312ha; & v)1.0128ha and are verified as per Kml file enclosed.
- IV. Copy of Survey of India topo sheet indicating boundary of forest land proposed to be diverted has up-loaded. (Section C of Maps-C.iii)

V. For Justification for locating the Project in Forest Land and Details of alternatives examined the user agency has stated that,

a) The project aims to restore connectivity to heritage sites of religious and cultural significance. This project is strategically tourism wise, pilgrimage wise important one. It may be useful for restoring service to Srilanka in future. The proposed alignment connects Jada Theertham temple, Kothandaramarkoil, Mukundarayan Chatram and Dhanushkodi.

b) Railway line existed till Dhanushkodi which was almost following the proposed alignment was washed away by a cyclone in 1964. This project aims to restore the track that existed before the cyclone. As the project is restoration of rail connectivity between Rameshwaram and Dhanushkodi. It follows erstwhile alignment which was in existence till 1964 and it is important from pilgrimage point of view to connect the stations mentioned above such as Jada Theertham temple, Kothandaramarkoil, Mukundarayan Chatram and Dhanushkodi.

- vi. Certificate from the District Collector, Ramanathapuram for Settlement of rights under Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers under Forest Rights Act 2006 in the prescribed format
- vii. Certificate from the District Collector, Ramanathapuram regarding non availability of non forest land vide Roc.B1/12365/2021 dated 19.07.2022.
- viii. Area requirement details. Bit I-4.6634ha; Bit II- 5.4194ha; Bit III – 16.9864ha; Bit IV – 0.5312ha; Bit v – 1.0128ha (Total – 28.6132ha)
- ix. DGPS maps on Bit I to Bit V of the proposed railway line
- x. GPS readings for Bit I to Bit V of the proposed railway line
- xi. Certificate that no catchment area treatment plan
- xii. Undertaking for the payment of cost along with any escalation for exploitation of trees if any available in the alignment path in the forest land involved.
- xiii. Undertaking for the payment of cost of felling of trees and transportation cost of the trees to be removed in the forest land involved.
- xiv. Undertaking for the payment of cost towards lease rent as fixed by the Forest Department at the time of sanction along with any escalation for the forest land to be diverted.
- xv. Under taking by the user agency for the payment of Net Present Value of the forest land involved.
- xvi. Under taking by the user agency to bear the cost of Compensatory Afforestation/Penal Compensatory Afforestation / maintenance of plantation /protection of plantation for the proposed diversion of forest land as fixed by

the Forest Department.

- xvii. Certificate given by the User Agency regarding the no violation of any provisions of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
 - xviii. Certificate by the User Agency that the demand of forest land for the project is minimum and all other alternatives have been examined and found not feasible.
 - xix. Undertaking by the user agency for the payment of Net Present Value of the forest land involved.
 - xx. Satellite imagery of proposed forest area and Photograph of Rameshwaram Reserved Forest.
3. The District Forest Officer has uploaded the Part-II recommendation of the above proposal and the details are furnished below.
- a) Area to be diverted for the above proposal is 28.6132 ha in Rameshwaram Reserved Forest and the density is 0.2 and type of forest is Eco class-4 .
 - b) As per section 4(ii), Species-wise and Girth-wise enumeration of trees, there are **1338Nos** of trees at various girth level were listed. Out of which 591 Nos. trees are spontaneous and others are non spontaneous.
 - c) In the Working plan prescription for the forest land proposed for diversion it is furnished that
 - (i) In order to bind the shifting sand dunes of the Rameshwaram Coast growing of *Casuarina equisetifolia* trees along the coastal area thereby increasing the utilitarian value of these lands which would otherwise remain barren.
 - (ii) It is proposed to raise revenue by selling the dead or fallen trees to the poor people of the same village through Village Forest Council. To reciprocate they should give complete protection for the concerned plantation.
 - d) Regarding vulnerability of the forest area to erosion, the proposed land for diversion falls in Gulf of Mannar Bio-sphere Reserve and located very close to tide line and thereby in CRZ. Hence, vulnerable for wind and tidal erosion.
 - e) Approximate distance of the proposed site for diversion from boundary of forest (in km.) :0
 - f) Details of wildlife present in and around the forest land proposed for diversion is Peacock, Black Napped Hare, Sand Boa, Brahminy kite, Greater flamingo, Sea turtle, terns etc., and Marine species in the nearby Sea.
 - g) The Forest land proposed for diversion is falls in Gulf of Mannar Bio-sphere Reserve and Coastal Regulation Zone. Hence, the User Agency should take necessary precautions while establishing infrastructures. Also, necessary care to be taken while venturing into nearby sea area to avoid possible damage to protect Marine Wildlife.

There shall be wildlife mitigation plan in place. The wildlife mitigation plan should consider protection and monitoring of habitat for marine turtle and migratory birds.

- h) The above proposed land is farms part of Gulf of Mannar Bio-sphere Reserve and Coastal Regulation Zone.
- i) In section 13, Details of Compensatory Afforestation, under patch wise details, an area of 57.50 ha in Mariyur Reserved Forest of Sayalkudi Range is selected for Compensatory Afforestation.
- j) The total financial cost of Compensatory Afforestation scheme is Rs.754.68 lacs for raising of nursery and planting of seedlings in 57.5ha Compensatory Afforestation land including 1 to 10 years maintenance and the details of Compensatory Afforestation scheme has been uploaded.
- k) The District Forest Officer, Ramanathapuram has furnished site suitability certificate for carrying out the Compensatory Afforestation works in the degraded forest area in Sy.No:121/1 of Mariyur village of Kadaladi Taluk in Mariyur Reserved Forest notified under Sec.16 of TNF Act1882 vide G.O.(MS) No:94 E&F,FR-14 Department dated 08.08.2016.

4. The District Forest Officer, Ramanathapuram has inspected the proposed project site and stated that

i. The site, proposed for diversion of forest for restoring railway connectivity between Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi, has been inspected on 29.10.2022, 24.12.2022 and 26.12.2022

ii. Total area proposed by diversion is 28.6132 Ha. and falls in Survey No 1026/354, 1026/5A, 1026/364, 1026/363, 1043, 1044/3, 1050, 1120 and 1063 and it is observed that proposed railway line crosses Rameswaram RF.

iii. The railway line also crosses the marine lagoon and mudflat areas. These marine lagoon and mudflats are important bird areas and habitat for migratory bird.

iv. The area is also adjacent to the notified sea turtle nesting sites. There must be a wildlife mitigation plan to deal with the monitoring of the habitat of Sea Turtles, Migratory Birds, other lagoon and Marine species etc.

5. In his recommendation, the District Forest Officer has stated that considering the importance of the proposed connectivity, the proposal for the diversion of forest land 28.6132 Ha for restoring railway connectivity between Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi is recommended with the following conditions.

a. Wildlife Mitigation Plan must be prepared and approved by PCCF and CWLW of Tamil Nadu. The Plan shall be funded by the User Agency. The plan must be made operational before the start of the project.

b. Connectivity with Forest Watch Tower and other forest facilities, inside the forest, should not be disturbed due to new railway line.

6. The Conservator of Forests & Field Director, SMTR, Madurai has inspected the above site on 10.11.2022 and 02.02.2023 and stated that the proposed Forest area for the restoration of Rail connectivity between Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi in Rameswaram Reserved Forests by the Deputy Chief Engineer IV, Arasaradi Madurai of Ramanathapuram Forest Division along with the Forest Range Officer, Rameswaram Range.

The total area proposed for diversion is 28.6132 ha. The proposed area lies in Survey numbers 1026/354, 1026/5A, 1026/364, 1026/363, 1043, 1044/3, 1050, 1120 and 1063 of Rameswaram village of Rameswaram taluk in Ramanathapuram District. The proposed forest area to be diverted for railway track is close to habitat for migratory birds especially Greater Flamingo. The forest land proposed for diversion is located within the Coastal Regulation Zone and also in Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve. Also, the proposed area located outside the Eco-sensitive zone of Gulf of Mannar National Park.

The Conservator of Forests & Field Director, SMTR, Madurai has uploaded his and revised recommendation in Part-III, stating that the above project area falls **outside the Eco-sensitive zone of Gulf of Mannar National Park**.

The Conservator of Forests has also stated that the alignment of proposed Railway track is done temporarily with small stones between Pamban to Muthuraman Sathiram in S.No. 1026/354 of Rameswaram village at Malligai nagar. **Spontaneous growth of *Azadirachta indica*, *Zizyphus mauritiana*, *Lannea coromandelica* and *Cassine glauca* was seen** and other planted species found are *Casuarina spp*, *Eucalyptus*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Thespesia populnea*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Borassus flabellifer* and *Ficus religiosa*.

7. In his recommendation in Part-III, the Conservator of Forest & Field Director, SMTR, Madurai has stated that the proposed railway line crosses through Rameswaram Reserved Forest and also crosses the marine lagoon and mudflat areas. These areas are habitat for migratory bird especially Flamingoes. The project is recommended subject to the condition that necessary wildlife mitigation plan and restoration plan must be prepared at the cost of user agency. The Conservator of Forests has recommended for 20 years.

8) In this regard, it is submitted that the User Agency has uploaded all the certificates/undertakings/details as required in this proposal.

9) The proposal is sent herewith duly recommended in the part IV of Form A by the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (FCA) / Nodal Officer (Forest Conservation Act).

10) The area proposed for diversion of forest land to an area of 28.6132ha for restoration of Rail connectivity between Rameshwaram and Dhanushkodi in Rameshwaram Reserved Forest in Ramanathapuram District is recommended and forwarded to the Government of Tamilnadu for obtaining approval from Government of India subject to the following conditions.

- (i) The legal status of the land shall remain unchanged and shall remain as Reserved Forests.
- (ii) The demarcation of the proposed forest area shall be carried out by erecting 4 feet height cement concrete pillars duly numbered at an interval of 20 mts at the cost of User Agency.
- (iii) The User Agency shall obtain the permission from the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India regarding felling of spontaneous growth in the forest area proposed for the project before Stage-II approval.
- (iv) The User Agency shall remit Compensatory Afforestation amount as demanded by the Forest Department.
- (v) The Compensatory Afforestation shall be raised in the degraded forest area of Mariyur Reserved Forest of Sayalkudi Range over an extent of 57.50ha at the cost of user agency.
- (vi) The User Agency shall pay the Net present value of the diverted forest area at the rates stipulated by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in File.No:5-3/2011-FC (Vol.I) dated 06.01.2022 and 19.01.2022 and from time to time, as per the orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court Order dated 28.03.2008 and 09.05.2008 in IA Nos. 826 in 566 with related IAS in Writ Petition(Civil) No.202/1995.
- (vii) The user agency shall remit the wildlife mitigation plan amount approved by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & Chief Wild life Warden.
- (viii) The fund from the User Agency towards Compensatory Afforestation, Net Present Value and Wildlife Mitigation plan under this project shall be deposited by generating chalan from the Ministry's online web portal. UTR No and date should be furnished.
- (ix) The Additional amount of the Net Present Value (NPV) of the diverted forest land if any, becoming due after revision of the same by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in future shall be charged by the State Government from the User Agency. The User Agency shall furnish an undertaking to the effect.
- (x) The user agency shall restrict the felling of trees to the minimum number in the project area and the trees shall be felled under the strict supervision of the State forest department and the cost of felling of trees shall be deposited by the user agency with the State forest department.

- (xi) The User Agency shall be responsible for any loss to Flora and Fauna in the surroundings and shall take all possible measures to conserve the same.
- (xii) The forest land shall not be used for any other purpose other than that specified in the proposal.
- (xiii) The layout plan of the proposal shall not be changed without prior approval of Government of India.
- (xiv) The lease rent should be realized from the User Agency as per G.O.Ms.No.272, E&F(FR.XIII) Dept. dated 15.04.1991.
- (xv) The period of lease is 20 years.
- (xvi) The User Agency should send renewal proposal one year before expiry of lease.
- (xvii) The Conservator of Forests and District Forest Officer may impose any other condition in the interest of conservation /protection land development of forests.

I enclose the proposal in duplicate duly recommended for obtaining concurrence of Government of India, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change, Integrated Regional Office, Chennai under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for diversion of forest land to an area of 28.6132ha for restoration of Rail connectivity between Rameshwaram and Dhanushkodi in Rameshwaram Reserved Forest in Ramanathapuram District in favour of Deputy Chief Engineer, Construction IV, Arsaradi, Madurai (Railways) for a period of 20 years.

Encl.: Proposal in duplicate.

Yours faithfully,

Am
31/3/2023.


for Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
(Head of Forest Force)

PART IV


(To be filed in by the Nodal Officer or Principal Chief Conservator of Forests or Head of Forest Department)

Name of Work: Forests – Ramanathapuram Division – SMTR, Madurai Circle- For diversion of forest land to an area of 28.6132ha for restoration of Rail connectivity between Rameshwaram and Dhanushkodi in Rameshwaram Reserved Forest in Ramanathapuram District - Online application uploaded by the User Agency – Deputy Chief Engineer, Construction IV, Arsaradi, Madurai(Railways)

Proposal No: FP/TN/^{IRAIL/}~~GEC~~/152033/2022

17. Detailed opinion and specific recommendation of the State Forest Department for acceptance or otherwise of the proposal with remarks.

(While giving opinion, the adverse comments made by concerned Conservator of Forests or Deputy Conservator of Forests should be categorically reviewed and critically commented upon).

"Recommended"

25/3/22

Date : 25.03.2023
Place: Chennai

Signature:

Name : V. Karuna Priya, IFS
Official Seal:

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
(Forest Conservation Act)/Nodal Officer