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Draft Uttarakhand Ecotourism Policy 2020

Department of Tourism

Government of Uttarakhand

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## Introduction

The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand with its rich biodiversity and natural wealth offers year-round good weather to millions of tourists visiting the state every year. From the snowbound peaks of the Himalayas to the moist Alpine scrub, sub Alpine forests, dry – temperate and moist- temperate forests to moist deciduous forests, the state possesses a wide biodiversity that in return nurtures a large multiplicity of floral and faunal forms. The state is home to nearly 4048 species of Angiosperms and Gymnosperms out of which nearly 116 species are specific to Uttarakhand i.e. their geographical distribution is limited to the boundaries of the state. 161 species of flora found in Uttarakhand are recognized as rare or threatened under the categorization of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Out of the 223 species of Orchids reported from the North Western Himalayas, over 150 have been reported from the State.

This great floral diversity supports a wide variety of faunal forms too. It includes about 102 species of mammals, 623 species of birds, 124 species of fish, 69 species of reptiles and 19 species of amphibians. Highly-endangered species like the Snow Leopard, Musk Deer, Tiger, Asian Elephant, Bharal, Himalayan Monal, Cheer Pheasant, King Cobra etc. find suitable habitat in the forests of Uttarakhand. In order to conserve this natural heritage, the state has declared twelve areas as ‘Protected’ including 6 National Parks and six Wildlife Sanctuaries. Nearly 65% of the geographical area of the State is under forest cover, of which over 12% comes under the Protected Area network. This exceeds the national average by a fair margin and is a reflection of the state’s commitment to conservation. The Corbett National Park established in 1936 is the first National Park of the Asian mainland. The Nandadevi Biosphere Reserve established under the “Man and biosphere” programme of UNESCO is Uttarakhand’s only and the country’s second Biosphere Reserve. This natural biodiversity is complimented with sacred cultural traditions, values and social practices which belong to local communities such as Bhotias, Tharus, Buxas, Jaunsaris, Rajis (or Banrawats), and indigenous groups such as Mahigeers and Vangujjars, which largely occupy relatively underdeveloped areas of the state or located in and around protected areas.

It is of utmost importance that Uttarakhand conserves its bio-cultural natural heritage while opening its doors to domestic and international tourists. The state government of Uttarakhand envisages developing tourist destinations in a planned manner through design of innovative and sustainable tourism products that are built on the state’s inherent strengths while protecting the most-frequented tourist destinations which have witnessed high traffic, haphazard development, and over-exploitation of resources.

This ecotourism policy[[1]](#footnote-1) aims to act as a guiding principle in bringing about a balanced amalgamation of tourism and conservation. It is designed keeping in mind the urgent need to put adequate safeguards that prioritize conservation of the environment, reduce threats to biodiversity, promote socio-economic development, particularly in rural parts of hill districts, and ***facilitate low-impact, responsible travel to natural areas*** which are culturally and ecologically sensitive. Involvement of local communities is a key pillar which would ensure greater prosperity for people living in natural ecosystems through generation of ***nature-compatible livelihoods***, thus helping to arrest the out-migration of people from the rural areas of the hill districts of the state, while generating economic returns, including direct income for the conservation of protected areas.

## Definition of Key Terms related to Ecotourism

2.1. **Ecotourism**: A form of sustainable tourism within a natural or cultural heritage area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, culture, and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics, as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the enrichment of host community and satisfaction of visitors.

The Ministry of Forest and Climate Change (previously, the Ministry of Forest) has described Ecotourism as ‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people’. Such tourism is low-impact, educational, and conserves the environment while directly benefiting the economic development of local communities[[2]](#footnote-2). Therefore, the focus of ecotourism is both on its educational as well as economic benefits while being compatible with the fragile natural ecosystem.

Since Uttarakhand’s ecotourism assets comprise natural as well as cultural attractions, certain water, land and air-based activities categorized under adventure tourism, culture-based tourism, wildlife tourism and/or rural tourism at pre-identified nature-based sites would also fall under ecotourism.

2.2. **Ecotourism Activities**: Activities coordinated by a qualified nature and cultural interpreter designed to entertain and educate clients.

It is important to note that in the context of Uttarakhand, we define **ecotourism activities as a separate category from ‘adventure tourism’.** Ecotourism activities are defined as those nature-based activities that are exclusively performed to sensitize people to the beauty and fragility of the state’s natural and cultural heritage, and not just focus on creating destinations in natural area or using natural environment for outdoor activities. Activities such as angling, rafting, kayaking, snorkelling, bungy-jumping, paragliding, etc. will fall under the category of adventure tourism and will be managed by the Adventure Tourism Wing of the UTDB.

In line with the above-mentioned distinction, ecotourism activities in Uttarakhand will include one or more of the following:

* Trekking, nature walk, bird and wildlife watching, hiking, flora and fauna photography, etc;
* Any travel focussed on experiencing Uttarakhand’s fairs and festivals which promote eco-tourism and sustainability of local traditions;
* Lodging in campsites, eco-lodges, homestays and guesthouses that are located in an area of natural and/or cultural beauty, and involves local specificities;
* Activities in specified areas of the forests such as jungle safari in vehicles or elephant back, trekking/nature walk, overnight camping in designated sites, bird watching and study of flora & fauna, etc.

2.3. **Sustainable Ecotourism Development**: Development of ecotourism in the state of Uttarakhand, which meets the needs and aspirations of the current generation without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations.

2.4. **Ecotourism Assets**: Natural and cultural features that attract visitors, such as landscapes, endemic or rare flora and fauna, local agricultural products, local culture including festivals, local folktales, history, historical monuments and heritage sites.

2.5. **Ecotourism Facilities**: accommodation, lodging facilities, and related amenities which blend with the natural and cultural environment of the area in terms of design, building materials, and energy, water and waste efficiency measures.

2.6. **Ecotour Operators**: Tour operators specializing to cater ecotours collaborating with local people focused on local nature and culture based tourism.

2.7. **Ecotourism Product**: A combination of resources, facilities, activities and services which are sold and managed through qualified ecotourism operators including local communities or individuals.

2.8. **Ecotourism Services:** basic services for ecotourism activities including but not limited to transportation, food, guiding, and interpretation. These services should cause minimum damage to the natural and cultural environment and promote a better understanding of the natural and cultural aspects of an area.

2.9. **Interpretation**: an educational activity to help visitors understand and appreciate the community resources. Interpretation includes facts, but also reveals the reason of the importance of those facts so that visitors are able to understand why the resources should matter to the individual visitors. Interpreter is a person who provides interpretation in natural and cultural areas, interpretation centre, parks and etc.

This policy is based on the understanding that local communities are the most critical pillar of ecotourism in the state. Ecotourism is an important vehicle for reconciling conservation and economic considerations for local stakeholders; therefore, ecotourism activities must not be limited to purely high-end, exclusive tourism which leaves out local communities.

## Policy Vision, Objectives, Principles and Key Directions

**3.1 Vision and Objectives:**

The vision of this policy is to encourage the development of unique, high quality and low impact ecotourism destinations in Uttarakhand that are centred around the conservation of flora and fauna, generation of quality educational experiences with regard to natural and cultural tradition of Uttarakhand, and contribution towards local employment generation, poverty alleviation, and promotion of wildlife and wilderness conservation in the state.

The main objectives of the Uttarakhand Ecotourism Policy are as follows:

* Ensure prior informed participation of all stakeholders and bring them together on a common platform of understanding on ecotourism;
* Ensure equal, effective and active participation of all stakeholders;
* Promote ecotourism in a sustainable manner based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) based on the four pillars of sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts;
* Promote the sustainable use of bio-diversity by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business network with an emphasis on socially and economically disadvantaged people;
* Share the benefits of ecotourism development equitability with the local communities and indigenous people;
* Provide opportunities to local communities to determine the appropriate presentation of their cultural values by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism business;
* Conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems, religious monuments, culture and traditions of the state of Uttarakhand;
* Offer memorable and high quality learning experience to visitors, and encouraging responsible behaviour during their visits and their collaboration for nature conservation efforts;
* Facilitate local children as well as visitors’ to enjoy and appreciate excellent nature-based activities;
* Encourage people of Uttarakhand to increase their pride and appreciation of local natural and cultural values;
* Reduce negative impacts of tourism in highly visited areas and divert traffic to other lesser explored destinations

**3.2 Principles:**

The following key principles or code of ethics will form the basic framework for planning and operation of ecotourism activities in the state:

1. Linking ecotourism activities to conservation benefits and raising awareness on the importance of safeguarding the integrity and diversity of natural ecosystems;
2. Defining carrying capacity of tourists visiting ecotourism sites annually in order to protect and maintain the quality and magnificence of forests, rivers and mountains in their pristine state;
3. Ensuring that the first benefit of ecotourism goes to the local people, particularly women, youth, indigenous people and other socially and economically vulnerable groups, through their active participation in the development, operation, management and promotion of ecotourism products;
4. Provision of quality basic infrastructure and services to ensure positive visitor experience at ecotourism destinations;
5. Promotion of local cuisine, handicrafts and souvenirs to improve local economy and highlight local culture, customs and traditions;
6. Enhancing partnerships between key stakeholders such as local communities, protected area managers (such as divisional forest officer), NGOs, relevant government organizations and private agencies for planning, implementation, coordination and monitoring ecotourism activities;
7. Committing to sustainability as a critical aspect of ecotourism to ensure rational use of resources for meeting the needs and requirements of future generations;
8. Promotion of environmentally-friendly practices, particularly with regard to waste management, water conservation and management, and use of locally produced and ecologically sustainable material
   1. **Key Directions**

In order to leverage Uttarakhand’s comparative advantages and offset threats that have constrained sustainable tourism growth in the past, there are four major strategic directions under this policy:

1. Develop and promote competitive ecotourist products and destinations that enhance inclusive growth;
2. Improve tourism industry manpower skills, competencies, and awareness;
3. Improve institutional cohesion with regard to ecotourism governance;
4. Develop strong monitoring and evaluation systems to monitor impacts, regulate ecotourism activities, and proactively offset any future threats to the socio-natural heritage
5. Draft destination management policies with respect to issue of passes, charging of fees, determining carrying capacity and single window clearance system, involvement of other stakeholders and revenue share with them, etc
6. **Institutional Arrangement**

There will exist an advisory body, the **Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism** (headed by the Honourable Chief Minister) with the ultimate policymaking and regulatory oversight powers for ecotourism planning and development in Uttarakhand. Additionally, the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) will create a separate and state level wing within its fold known as the ‘**Ecotourism Wing’** headed by ACEO (Ecotourism Wing) to help achieve the mission and objectives of the State Ecotourism Policy. The administrative functions and legislation of this body will extend throughout the state of Uttarakhand. UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will comprise a district-level operational system in the form of **District Ecotourism Committees** which will incorporate various Community-Based Organizations (CBO) and work in tandem with Gram/Nagar Panchayats, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Tourism Development Committee (TDC), and other local people’s representative groups.

To support the objective of this policy, UTDB will create a dedicated Program Management Unit (PMU) for the implementation of Ecotourism policy, which may include hiring consultancy firms (such as Transaction Advisors, PMC etc.), if required, to improve the capacity and capability of the UTDB Ecotourism Wing.

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**4.1. Empowered Committee for Ecotourism**

The Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism will be headed by the **Chief Minister** with the Secretary Tourism/CEO UTDB as Member Secretary and representations from Department of Forests, other relevant state departments, civil society, and private sector. The constitution of the Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism is proposed as follows:

**Table 1: Members of the Empowered Committee for Ecotourism**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Chairperson | Chief Minister |
| 2. | Vice Chairperson | Minister of Tourism |
| 3. | Vice Chairperson | Minister of Forests & Wildlife |
| 4. | Member | Chief Secretary |
| 5. | Member Secretary | Secretary Tourism/CEO UTDB |
| 6. | Member | Secretary, Department of Rural Development |
| 7. | Member | Secretary, Department of Forest |
| 8. | Member | Secretary, Department of Industries |
| 9. | Member | Secretary, Department of Finance |
| 10. | Member | Secretary, Department of Revenue |
| 11. | Member | PCCF Uttarakhand |
| 12. | Member | Concerned national association representative |
| 13. | Member | Two representatives from NGO/CBO working in the field of sustainable tourism |
| 14. | Member | Private stakeholders from travel and hospitality sector |
| 15. | Member | Any other invitee with the permission from the Chairperson |

**Roles & Responsibility of Ecotourism Committee**

The Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism willbe the final planning and decision-making body for ecotourism promotion and development in Uttarakhand. Its roles and responsibilities will be as follows:

* Design policies and regulations on all matters related to ecotourism activities in the state;
* Provide directions to state departments to comply with various ecotourism directives, and bring all key stakeholders on a common platform of understanding of ecotourism activities carried out by the state-level and district-level ecotourism bodies;
* Review and finalize a draft ecotourism action plan and a long-term development plan prepared by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) which will include detailed guidelines for ecotourism;
* Recommend special legislation and rules for formation of appropriate regulatory mechanism, robust grievance redressed mechanism as may be required;
* Monitor activities of UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) to ensure minimum negative impacts on the biodiversity and ecosystems. The emphasis should be on the carrying capacity of the Protected Areas in the state;
* Ensure the development and maintenance of appropriate auditing and monitoring standards to ensure highest standards of transparency and accountability;
* Constitute from time to time, any committees/sub-committees comprising experts as members and staff and assign specific responsibilities;
* Evaluate the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism activities and existing rules and regulations, and review and revise the rules in consultation with the stakeholders which have direct or indirect influence to the ecotourism activities as and when necessary;
* Assess revenue generation and allocation of funds for the development of ecotourism activities.

4.2. **UTDB (Ecotourism Wing)**

UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will be the nodal executing agency for implementing ecotourism programmes and activities, and monitor the development and operation of ecotourism at all levels. It shall function under the supervision of the UTDB Board (formed as per the UTDB Act 2001) which is headed by the Honourable Minister of Tourism.

The UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) shall have representation from the Tourism as well as Forest department and will perform the following functions:

**A. Planning & Development**

* Prioritize, screen, scope and sanction all ecotourism projects and activities proposed by district ecotourism committees and those conceptualized within UTDB;
* Identify new ventures that come under the purview of ecotourism principles outlined above; finalize list of activities that fall under “ecotourism” and revise from time-to-time subject to the approval of the Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism;
* Gather periodic feedback and suggestions from various stakeholders such as visitors, local community, tourism professionals, representatives from Government agencies, industry bodies, practitioners, academicians etc;
* Coordinate with the State Home Department and other related key government organizations in border-sensitive sites to ensure the smooth operation of ecotourism activities;
* Coordinate activities with the Department of Culture for capacity building in local folklore and arts, protection and preservation of monuments, etc.
* Plan and organize training and upskilling initiatives for members of UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) and District Ecotourism Committees to enhance their knowledge, skills and expertise in relation to rules, regulations, and guidelines on forestry, environment, tourism, etc;
* Establish detailed guidelines for visitors, ecotourism operators and guides, research scholars, etc by area (protected and non-protected), and revise them in consultation with the key stakeholders including NGOs, CBOs, local communities, tour operators and relevant government authorities from time to time as per the requirement;
* Work in close collaboration with state government departments such as Forest, Rural Development, Social Welfare, Industries, Finance, Revenue, State Horticulture Mission, and research institutions such as Wildlife Institute of India and Forest Research Institute to assimilate new ideas, opportunities and concerns regarding development of ecotourism activities and programmes based on the existing expertise in the state;
* Establish ecotourism health, safety and emergency procedures and standards and facilitate their implementation;
* Organize seminars, workshops and international conferences among concerned government officials, NGO, CBO, and other stakeholders on issues related to ecotourism;
* Make or amend the rules under the provisions of UTDB Act 2001 that will be applicable for effective implementation of the ecotourism policy.

**B. Finance**

* Monitor the revenue generated from ecotourism projects and activities;
* Identify funds for financing the development of ecotourism in the state e.g. state and central grants, international project grants and concessional loan programmes, public private partnerships, crowd funding, etc;
* Identify subsidies and incentives to attract private players and local communities for development of ecotourism projects; draft necessary guidelines to include information such as eligibility criteria, conditions for availing concessions and incentives, etc;
* Develop a plough-back mechanism with an autonomous status for funds generated for sustainability of ecotourism-related activities.

**C. Operation & Management**

* Work in close collaboration with district ecotourism committees and various state-level stakeholders such as industry bodies, scientific research institutions, NGOs, and government departments to implement and monitor ecotourism activities;
* Set standards for carrying capacity in the ecotourism zones and forested areas to prevent damage to the biodiversity and ecosystems;
* Legitimize the use of the ‘ecotourism’ tag on all existing and proposed activities or projects;
* Encourage socio-ecologically responsible tourism by undertaking and facilitating trainings and capacity-building initiatives of key stakeholders, and encourage participation of stakeholders in conferences, seminars and workshops for government officials, NGO, CBO, and other stakeholders to identify emerging needs and concerns;
* Publish newsletters, bulletins, pamphlets, status reports and other information, and disseminate important government notifications and rules.

**D. Monitoring & Evaluation**

* Perform monitoring and evaluation roles to track the environmental and socio-economic impacts caused by ecotourism activities;
* Monitor the activities of district ecotourism committees and private players involved in ecotourism-related projects;
* Maintain a record of all assets created under the state ecotourism initiative as per rules;
* By engaging relevant ground-level organizations, monitor and influence the activities of private entities which violate the vision, principles and objectives of ecotourism.

4.3. **District Ecotourism Committee**

The district ecotourism committees will be headed by the **District Magistrate** and will be responsible for identifying, proposing, executing and monitoring eco-tourism sites and ventures at the district level. UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) shall closely coordinate with all district-level ecotourism committees on ecotourism initiatives at identified locations. The constitution is suggested as follows:

**Table 2: Members of District Ecotourism Committee**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Chairman | District Magistrate |
| 2. | Member | Divisional Forest Officer |
| 3. | Member | Chief Development Officer |
| 4. | Member Secretary | District Tourism Development Officer |
| 5. | Member | Block Development Officer |
| 6. | Member | Representative of concerned Gram Panchayats |
| 7. | Member | Representative of Zilla Parishad |
| 8. | Member | Representatives of concerned eco-development committee(s) in the district |
| 9. | Member | One local-level NGOs and CBOs |

The role of District Ecotourism Committees will be as follows:

A. **Planning & Development:**

* Assist UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) in identifying, planning and development of new ecotourism zones, circuits, and sites;
* Ensure the implementation and execution of the ecotourism guidelines at the district level;
* Coordinate with UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) and various stakeholders such as local communities, private operators, CBOs, NGOs, etc. to ensure the smooth operation of ecotourism activities;
* Implement the strategies described in Uttarakhand Ecotourism Policy (given in the following sections);
* Identify new ecotourism products within the district and forward proposals to UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) for approval and further guidance;

1. **Finance**

* Develop annual budgets and actions plans for development of new ecotourism products, and for repair and maintenance of existing ecotourism initiatives at the district level;
* Monitor the revenue generation and allocation of funds for the development of ecotourism at the district level.

**C. Operation & Management**

* Manage operations for responsible eco-tourism at the ground level including marketing, publicity and promotion, information-sharing with visitors, etc (see Strategy section below for more information);
* Liaison with CBOs and NGOs working in tourism or natural resources management for assistance and support in delivery of capacity-building programmes or development of relevant training material at the district and local level;
* Undertake trainings organized by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) and plan similar capacity building measures for members of district ecotourism committees to enhance their knowledge, skills, and expertise in relation to rules, regulations, and guidelines on forestry, environment, etc;
* Monitor activities to ensure visitors, tour operations, tour agencies, and guides follow standards and prescribed guidelines to prevent damage to the biodiversity and ecosystems;
* Enlist various CBOs, NGOs and private agencies at the district level for delivery of training, capacity-building and certification programmes;
* Cooperate with UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) in the design, planning, development, and dissemination/execution of various training materials and programmes.

**D. Monitoring & Evaluation**

* Monitor the local-level impacts of ecotourism activities and plan necessary remedial measures to mitigate the same;
* Enlist ecotourism operators in the district and monitor their activities;
* Facilitate scientific assessment of relatively unexplored ecotourism destinations for their potential and promotion;
* Develop participatory ecotourism monitoring plans in collaboration with NGOs, CBOs, SHGs, Panchayat, EDCs, etc;
* Monitor the training and capacity building programmes conducted by various agencies and provide support and cooperation;
* Maintain an inventory of all ecotourism assets and features within the district.

In addition to the above-mentioned roles, detailed functions to be performed by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) and District Ecotourism Committees are outlined in the **Strategy section** below.

1. **Strategy**

**5.1. Identification & Selection of Ecotourism locations**

* The district ecotourism committee headed by the District Magistrate will be responsible for identification and proposal of new projects and activities within and outside of forested areas. This committee will comprise members of eco-development committees that are affiliated with the Department of Forest. All proposals will be forwarded to UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) for further guidance and approval;
* UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will be responsible for identifying and proposing ecotourism circuits which could potentially allow the development of new, or use of existing, forest rest houses and/or camping sites within forest areas;
* All ecotourism proposals involving the use of forest areas will be forwarded to the Department of Forests by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) for review and comments;
* The final authority for selection and establishment of ecotourism projects will lie with the district ecotourism committees and UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) at state level depending on the funding source and resource availability;
* The district ecotourism committees will send their proposals for new ecotourism sites to UTDB (Ecotourism Wing )for securing state government approval. UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will provide all guidance and direction on the next steps including help in identifying potential partners for the operation;
* UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will be responsible for identifying and selecting partners for development of ecotourism products/sites in PPP mode. The detailed guidelines for management and operation of such sites will be issued by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing).

**5.2. Planning, Zoning & Modelling**

Zoning for ecotourism development will be based on the idea of concentrating environmental impacts in small areas and sparing protected and vulnerable sites from environmental disturbance. **It is advisable to use sites that have already received some human intervention in order to avoid impacting intact sites**.

Zoning will be carried out in key districts of Uttarakhand for identifying and demarcating core intervention areas for ecotourism development. Such zones which will be called ‘**ecotourism zones’** and can be developed around specific activities, for e.g., ecotourism zone for trekking, ecotourism for bird watching, ecotourism for nature photography, etc.

The criteria for determining the suitability of zones will be as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Zoning attributes | Characteristics |
| Physical & Environmental | Landscape/Naturalness   * Visibility * Land use cover * Scenic beauty * Natural Hazards   Wildlife   * Species diversity i.e. abundance and density of unique, endangered, endemic or charismatic species * protection/reservation of species   Topography:   * Elevation * Slope |
| Socio-economic | Accessibility:   * Distance from roads * Possibility for human mobility   Community:   * Settlement size * Willingness to participate |
| Administrative | Visitors:   * Degree of autonomy for visitors * Level of skills required for visitors to enter a zone * Permits and reservations * Need for guides * Need for patrolling * Types of infrastructure permitted in the zone |

The strategies for planning and zoning of ecotourism sites and other general tourism sites involving ecotourism activities will be as follows:

* Department of Forest and Tourism Department will work together to identify ecotourism zones as well as general tourism zones, keeping in mind the need to provide a diverse range of visitor experiences;
* Prior to establishment of the ecotourism zones, consultations will be planned with local NGOs, CBOs, local people’s representative groups, and private tour operators for identification of important and/or previously unexploited attractions which can be developed under the ecotourism zones;
* Specific management rules, regulations and policies will be drafted by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) to govern visitor use of the zones, e.g. use of guides, skill levels for visitors entering a specific zone, permits, camping, campfires, group size, etc across all districts;
* Rules, regulations and policies will be effectively communicated to visitors, and surrounding local communities so that they understand the ‘ground rules’;
* Selected ecotourism zones will be developed as model ecotourism areas, and support will be extended to these zones in areas of finance, capacity building, provision of facilities and equipment, for the purpose of dissemination of these successful cases to the other ecotourism zones;
* The design and appearance of new ecotourism infrastructures will be regulated, for e.g. accommodation, viewpoints, footpaths, and restaurants should blend with the natural landscape;
* Construction of roads in ecotourism zones will be regulated based on the local needs.

After a zoning scheme for an area has been established, site plans must be prepared under the direction of the District Ecotourism Committee to facilitate new construction within or near the intensive-use zone based on sustainable ecotourism principles. The visitor site planning process would be best carried out by a team comprising a landscape architect, a biologist or ecologist, and an environmental engineer, who should all have some training in environmental impact evaluation and tourism infrastructure, along with a team of local residents who are familiar with the site and/or environmental conditions in the area.

**5.3. Departmental Coherence**

## It is of utmost important to establish necessary linkages and strong coordination between the Department of Tourism, Department of Rural Development and Department of Forest in order to fully tap into the Uttarakhand’s ecotourism potential. There must exist synergies between policies and programmes of the two departments, for e.g. Uttarakhand Panchayati Forest Rules 2005, Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2018, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Griha Awaas Homestay Policy 2019, etc.

## For all ecotourism sites developed within forest areas, the Department of Forest will be required to issue specific guidelines, wherever applicable, under the National Forest Policy and formulate rules based on notifications of the MOEFCC such as the June 2011 Guidelines for Ecotourism in and around Protected Areas, etc.

## UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will be responsible for establishing linkages with all other related departments such as Finance, Industry, Social Welfare, Horticulture, etc in the state.

**5.4. Key Stakeholders & their Functions**

1. **Ecotourism Wing under the UTDB**: Promote ecotourism based on the principles, vision and objectives outlined above; horizontal and vertical coordination with stakeholders (between government departments and at different levels of governance) to ensure smooth decision-making and operations; provide training and capacity-building; raise awareness and build high-value educative experiences for visitors;
2. **District Ecotourism Committees**: Promote, manage and supervise all ecotourism-related activity at the district level; ensure sustainable use and conservation of natural heritage
3. **Local communities**: conserve natural resources, especially within and outside protected areas; play an active role in ecotourism planning, development and management; share local or traditional knowledge and culture to provide a positive tourist experience
4. **State-level government departments (Tourism, Forest, Rural Development, Industries, Horticulture, etc):** participate in ecotourism planning and development; provide leadership, articulate clear goals and vision for ecotourism; establish specific policies aimed at generating positive visitor experience and minimizing impact on the environment
5. **District-level administration:** provide support at the ground level to enhance ecotourism opportunities; facilitate positive experience to tourists
6. **Private partners managing ecotourism sites**: follow the ecotourism principles and values outlined above; promote sustainable, high value and low impact tourism and encourage good tourist behaviour;
7. **Research institutions**: provide expertise in planning and operations of ecotourism; facilitate learning; contribute to existing knowledge on conservation; provide support in developing surveys for monitoring and evaluation, promotional material, inventory of flora and fauna, data on tourism patterns, impact of tourism, etc.
8. **NGOs and CBOs**: provide a forum for discussion and influence with regard to ecotourism; provide support either directly through programme management or site administration of selected ecotourism destinations or indirectly, as trainers, advisors, and business partners with ecotourism companies or communities
9. **Travellers:** respect and follow sustainable ecotourism principles outlined in the policy; make responsible travel choices with regard to the ecological sensitivity of tourist destination; provide timely feedback and suggestions when requested.

**5.5. Finance**

For ecotourism to be practised in letter and spirit, adequate funds will have to be identified and allocated, in addition to funds generated from ecotourism sites, for the upkeep of the environment and the local community. In addition to revenue generated from ecotourism activities, specific funds will have to be identified by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) and allocated with the approval of the UTDB Board.

Some sources of financing that can be tapped into for development of ecotourism products in Uttarakhand include:

* Budget provisions and grants available from funds available to the UTDB, Department of Forest, Uttarakhand State CAMPA and other such sources;
* Existing schemes of MOEFCC, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD), amongst others, e.g. the MOEFCC-financed ‘Green Skill Development Programme’ which can be used to offer skill-oriented courses to youth or the MWCD-financed ‘STEP Scheme’ which provide funds to increase employability of women by providing entrepreneurial skills and upgrading competencies;
* User charges or concession fee on eco-tourism sites in PPP mode;
* Wider tourism tax or membership fees from tourism industry players;
* Eco-tax/eco-cess or environmental charges;
* Funding from national foundations and private sector sponsorship;
* International assistance through bilateral and multilateral development banks in the form of grants and/or concessional loans;
* Small funding from UTDB, Ministry of Tourism and other such sources to local communities desiring to engage in village tourism or agro-tourism through government grants;
* Encourage banks to extend soft loans to individuals/groups and provide government loan guarantee to individuals/groups keen in ecotourism-related activities;
* Resources generated from ecotourism projects under PPP mode

An environmental cess/tax for ecotourism will be fixed by the Ecotourism Wing of the UTDB in a transparent manner with the aim of ploughing back the revenue earned from the tax/cess into conservation activities of the environment and local cultural traditions.

While the above-mentioned financing sources present numerous opportunities for undertaking ecotourism activities, a long term strategy must be devised for supporting ecotourism promotion through dedicated funding arrangements as part of an State Ecotourism Action Plan.

For subsidies and incentives:

Incentives and subsidies outlined under the 2018 Tourism Policy of Uttarakhand shall apply to ecotourism projects and activities as well.

The following activities could qualify for financial support from the Ecotourism Wing of the UTDB for the purpose of ecotourism development in the state:

* Capacity building and training for staff on tourist management;
* Seed money for the development of ecotourism sites by local communities or private companies;
* Investment/construction of necessary infrastructure and facilities in ecotourism zones such as paths, sewage, drinking water facilities, toilet facilities, parking area, etc;
* Sign boards in public places, tree labelling etc;
* Safety measures such as handrails, providing life jackets etc;
* Maintenance of trekking routes;
* Waste management including providing eco-friendly waste bins in appropriate places, providing substance for plastic carry bags, etc;
* Subsidies to finance large-scale water management measures such as rainwater harvesting systems, groundwater recharge, and other techniques related to recycling, reducing and reusing water;
* Providing interpretational and educational information about the ecotourism sites through establishment of information centres, publishing pamphlets, etc;
* Restoration of old heritage structures of religious, archaeological or historical significance, and forest rest houses dedicatedly used for ecotourism purposes;
* Promotion of renewable energy resources in the operation of ecotourism sites, such as through use of solar or wind power

Priority will be given to spend the income generated from ecotourism on tourism management, interpretation and ecodevelopment works.

**5.6. Training & Capacity-building**

Training and capacity building will be focused on the following activities:

* Capacity building measures for the members of UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) in order to enhance its human resources on matters involving forest, environment and tourism regulations. Additionally, capacity-building measures will be planned for other staff members of UTDB and Forest Department to bring them on the same page regarding the meaning of ecotourism, its principles, ethos and vision, and key stakeholders and their functions;
* Nature interpretation centres and guide facilities shall be established wherever necessary. Staff and guides shall be trained and certified to assist tourists during safari, trekking, nature education and other permitted activities;
* Training and capacity building shall be conducted through trained CBOs to local communities including homestay owners, youth and women’s groups who wish to engage on ecotourism activities. Specific themes to be covered are environmental education, home stay management, waste management, water conservation and management, computing, finance, ecotour program designing, interpretation, risk management, cooking local cuisine, guides for trekking, bird watching, fauna and flora photography, angling, rafting, religious monuments and languages;
* Appropriate training modules shall be prepared on themes such as environmental education, homestay management, waste management, water conservation and management (e.g. groundwater recharge), ecotourism product designing, etc; Experiential trips, field visits and workshops shall be arranged for all parties who wish to engage in ecotourism activities;
* Public-private partnerships shall be encouraged in training of nature guides and tour operators for new skills such as foreign language with assistance of specialized language institutes; Active involvement of industry associations shall be sought for promoting training in hospitality and tourism services, and ensuring adoption of a Minimum Standard Operating Procedure (MSOP) by providing incentives and awards for good performance;
* UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) shall coordinate with various public research institutions for designing and executing relevant training programmes such as the Wildlife Institute of India which hosts certificate courses for the youth in environment, forestry, wildlife and climate change under the Green Skill Development Programme under the MOEFCC;
* UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) shall periodically certify tourism sector workforce and arrange refresher courses for earlier certified guides for standardization and knowledge up-gradation. In addition, it shall also recognise and certify already employed Tourism Workforce through Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna under Recognition of Prior Learning;
* The District Ecotourism Committees shall identify low season income generation activities to complement ecotourism activities such as handicraft souvenirs, food and fruit processing, production, repairing and maintenance of adventure equipment

**5.7. Product Development & Marketing**

Product Development

Market-driven ecotourism products will be developed for identified ecotourism zones and clusters based on a comprehensive market analysis through

(a) Primary research which may include:

* informal observation of the ecotourism market in the Hindu Kush Himalayan states of India
* surveys or interviews with members of the tourism and travel sector including travel agents and tour operators, local suppliers such as hotels, resorts, restaurants, and guides, NGOs, etc.
* questionnaires distributed to visitors in the region that potentially represents the ecotourism market

(b) Secondary research which may include:

* visitor exit surveys
* surveys and reports on the ecotourism market in the mountain states of India as well as Hindu Kush Himalayan countries such as Nepal and Bhutan
* data from tourism magazines, academic journals, and reports published by UNWTO, UNDP, APEC, etc that provide information on nature-based tourism
* data from national/regional planning agencies, travel associations, city/municipal or provincial tourism offices

Marketing

Strategies for marketing of ecotourism products in Uttarakhand are:

* Link marketing and promotion of ecotourism products to the general marketing efforts of Department of Tourism; a dedicated online website with website linkages will be set up and run by UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) as a one-stop information platform for promotion and online booking of all ecotourism activities and sites;
* Develop and regularly update a series of maps of ecotourism sites and activities (sites to visit, distance, required time, geographical features, altitudes, available services, local rules, rules for ecotour, resources interpretation, etc.);
* Improve and enhance existing ecotourism products such infrastructure of trekking routes and interconnecting existing routes, public toilets and waste management systems, water management, government-owned rest houses;
* Promote environmentally-friendly lodges managed by local individuals/communities in or near wilderness areas;
* Improve and enhance existing homestay facilities such as toilets, shower, bedroom and dining rooms which meet the need of visitors especially from foreign countries;
* Facilitate linkages with selected tour operators, hoteliers, homestay owners and other organizations already engaged in tourism for the marketing and promotion of ecotourism products;
* Develop ecotourism activities and products for different target groups (adults, children, family, researchers/experts and hobbyists, etc) and disseminate information on eco-tourism products through Interpretation Centres which can also work as Ecotourism Promotion Centres;
* Promote village tourism through micro-level planning in both short and medium terms through activities such as:
  + feasibility mapping of ecotourism potential
  + designation of roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders in decentralized manners
  + drafting of business plan for ecotourism (benefit sharing, marketing and business, price rates and services standards, products, financing, personnel, risk management, etc.)
  + Drafting waste management plan (collection and treatment)
  + Tourism infrastructure management
  + Carrying capacity of visitors
  + Village conservation plan
* Lead skill improvement workshops for ecotour guides and local interpreters;
* Promote local communities to produce agricultural products to offer as local cuisines, and local handicrafts and souvenirs on a sustainable manner with minimum impacts on ecosystems and its own culture;
* Develop new ecotourism products such as bird watching trails, nature photography, medicinal tourism, traditional and cultural experience tours such as craft making, cooking, dancing, nature hikes;
* Promote festivals which have direct relation to nature and biodiversity conservation;
* Coordinate repair and maintenance of rest houses owned by Forest Department

**5.8. Infrastructure Development & Carrying Capacity Analysis**

Strategies for infrastructure development and carrying capacity analysis include:

* Restrict concrete infrastructures and building structures inside protected areas;
* Construct and improve appropriate infrastructures around protected areas such as visitor-friendly signboards with interpretive manners, footpaths, garbage bins, interpretation centre including informative maps showing the trekking routes, toilets and viewpoints at the entrance of each protected area;
* Promote renewable energy systems for tourism purposes;
* Develop flexible and sustainable approaches to ensuring solid waste and water management;
* Conduct carrying capacity analysis inside protected areas based on three key dimensions:
  + Physical-ecological - comprising all fixed and flexible components of the natural and cultural environment, and infrastructure. The fixed components refers to the capacity of natural systems; the flexible components refer primarily to infrastructure systems like water supply, sewerage, electricity, transportation, social amenities such as postal and telecommunication services, health services, law and order services, banks, shops, and other services
  + Socio-demographic - refers to those social aspects which are important to local communities and includes issues such as available manpower or trained personnel, as well as socio-cultural issues such as the sense of identity of the local community or the tourist experience etc.
* Political-economic - refers to the impacts of tourism on the local economic structure and activities including competition to other sectors. Also includes institutional issues to the extent that they involve local capacities to manage the presence of tourism.

**5.9. Safety**

* Develop infrastructure and tourist facilities in consideration of tourist safety;
* Conduct risk assessments from time-to-time, e.g. safety checks on equipment used for ecotourism activities, testing water quality in ecotourism zones, ensuring the following of basic safety measures in all ecotourism facilities;
* Raise awareness about risks and controls of ecotourism activities through staff training at least twice a year;
* Provide necessary communication tools, equipment and systems, for e.g. satellite phones, two-way radio, CCTV, etc in ecotourism zones to communicate effectively in case of natural hazards or accidents;
* Provide customer briefing notes to visitors with detailed information such as prohibited area, dangerous areas and animals, to ensure complete knowledge of any risks involved in undertaking an ecotourism activity or entering any site;
* Plan trainings and issue certificates for safety; the training should focus on methods of risk management and quick rescue operation skills and should be disseminated to all tour operators, guides, travel agents whose clients may have accidents and injuries caused by the engagement of ecotourism activities;
* Require insurance for tour operators, guides, and tour agents whose clients may have accidents and injuries during their trip, and require guides to carry first aid kit when they are in the field with their clients;
* Plan a system of notifying landslides in high risk areas and other dangerous places for visitors and update these notifications regularly through association with tour operators, tour agents, guides and drivers of vehicles;
* Develop a series of hazardous maps of ecotourism sites (places, characteristics of hazardous, etc.) in Uttarakhand and update them regularly;
* Plan a quick response team and emergency plans for any accidents related to ecotourism activities, for e.g. planning a system of emergency call for medical doctors in case of visitor’s sickness or injury;
* Develop appropriate safety guides and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which can be used as a unique selling point for attracting more tourists

**5.10. Certification**

* UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) shall identify necessary accreditations/certifications as well as recognized certification bodies for the purpose of promoting sustainable tourism standards that adhere to ecotourism principles and vision of the state for e.g., sustainable business training and certification programme for ecotourism operators, guides and accommodation facilities on themes such as nature and scope of ecotourism, understanding the ecotourism market, recreation impacts on the environment, incorporating ecotourism principles into ecotourism activity planning, accepted practices for service facilities, legal and safety considerations, etc;
* UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will also be responsible for ensuring transparency in the certification process based on specific guidelines and monitoring activities through social auditing.

**5.11. Awareness & Education on Ecotourism and Conservation**

* Plan awareness programmes on ecotourism policy contents, guidelines and functions of various ecotourism-related agencies such as the Ecotourism Wing of the UTDB, District Ecotourism Committees, other line departments and local communities;
* Make available well-trained local guides and interpreters serving visitors;
* Plan production of diverse interpretation media e.g. electronic, printed or verbal guides on flora and fauna found in the habitat, pre-tour material such as briefing sheets and brochure, interpretive brochures, audio visuals, reference material and self-guiding trails such as interpretive signage or brochures;
* All information provided must be verified through any of the following sources - reference books or publications; professionals like scientists, protected area managers, sociologists, anthropologists, etc; museums or zoos; documentaries; recognized bodies or interest groups; traditional custodians and elders in the community; recognized training courses;
* Introduce codes of conduct to educate visitors on what should or should not do when visiting ecotourism sites;
* Plan awareness and educational programmes for local communities and school children on environment conservation, and waste and water management using diverse methods such as talks and lectures by specialists, theatre performance, other interpretive activities;
* Plan nature-based activities for local children managed by qualified ecotour guides

**5.12. Monitoring & Review**

* Draft clear monitoring and reporting procedures for different groups of stakeholders such as UTDB (Ecotourism), District Ecotourism Committee, civil private stakeholders, etc;
* Ensure all necessary national/state level licences and permits (e.g. health and sanitation certificates, environmental clearances, noise pollution norms, etc) are issued and are valid for legalizing operations;
* Monitor the environmental impacts of ecotourism on biodiversity and local communities, and plan/take necessary remedial measures to mitigate the same;
* Assess whether management and operation of all ecotourism activities are in line with the objectives and vision aligned with the principles of ecotourism, for e.g. if the fee collection system is in place and approved by authorities;
* Assess if adequate systems are installed to control access/use of natural resources in project site;
* Monitor socio-economic outcomes of ecotourism initiatives in the form of benefit-sharing, employment generation, and poverty alleviation goals;
* Monitor the condition of designated travel routes, walkways, paths, tracks and campsites, and provide feedback to State Ecotourism Directorate;
* Monitor training and capacity building programmes that are conducted by various other agencies, and provide support and cooperation;
* Enlist ecotourism operators in the state and monitoring of their activities;
* Facilitate scientific assessment of relatively unexplored ecotourism destinations for their potential and promotion;
* Develop participatory ecotourism monitoring plans and involve multiple stakeholders such as NGOs, CBOs, TDCs, Panchayat, EDCs, etc in monitoring activities;
* Monitor effectiveness and quality of information-sharing systems (such as Interpretation Centres, tour guides, printed/visual/audio material, etc) through visitor feedback;
* Regular collection of data on performance of ecotourism products and activities;
* Research and documentation of ecotourism assets and features

The projects shall be monitored periodically by the Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism and all assistance for this purpose will be rendered by UTDB (Ecotourism).

For local community-led projects, the district ecotourism committees will be responsible for monitoring operations on the ground and submit a review report to UTDB (Ecotourism). For all projects led and assigned by the department, including those involving private partners, UTDB (Ecotourism Wing) will review each ecotourism programme every quarter and submit a consolidated report to the Empowered Committee for Eco-tourism for review.

1. **Commencement**

The Uttarakhand Ecotourism Policy 2020 shall come into form the date of issuing notification in this regard by the Government of Uttarakhand and shall be reviewed every five years to incorporate any changes or amendments required.

1. This document has been conceptualized and drafted based on review of several policy documents and reports, notably, Sikkim Ecotourism Policy (Department of Forest, Wildlife and Environmental Management, Government of Sikkim) and 2017 Re-revised Policy on Development of Ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh (Department of Forest, Government of Himachal Pradesh) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Guidelines for ecotourism in and around protected areas, Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2nd June 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)