

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR AUDITORS AND OBSERVERS

Pilot Testing for Draft Ecotourism Certification Standard

NCCF calls for the participation of the interested CBs for the Pilot Testing of the NCCF's Ecotourism Certification Standard.

Eligibility

Insert eligibility criteria for the CBs:

- The pilot testing is to be conducted by a team comprising of a qualified auditor and an observer having the following qualification and experience:

Auditor Qualifications

- a. Qualified Sustainable Tourism Auditor (reorganized by GSTC, TCI and others) or an Auditor trained in social, environmental and economic development, as well as in the Sustainable Management Tourism activities.
- b. Having auditing experience in sustainability certification preferably the Tourism/Sustainable Tourism, Forest Management Certification, any other related certification scheme, etc.along with the expertise of reviewing the certification assessment reports.
- c. Preference shall be given to candidates with work experience with Ecotourism.

Observer- The observer would be a person of significant experience and stature from the field of tourism/sustainable tourism, ecology, conservation, and natural resource management; knowledge and experience about certification will be preferred.

Tasks

The whole process will be conducted under the overall guidance and supervision of the Chairman, Ecotourism, SDG who would be in charge of the process as well as outcomes and their interpretation.

Training on the Ecotourism certification standard will be conducted for the audit team by NCCF either at the administrative office or online to familiarize the members with the standard.

The audit team will be expected to undertake the following tasks:

- a. The team will contact the respective Pilot Testing Site/Area staff and coordinate with them regarding logistics and audit.
- b. Assess the Management Entity against the Principles, Criteria, and Indicators of the Draft Ecotourism Certification Standard.
- c. Conduct the field audit/test according to the Work Plan.
- d. Prepare a draft Field Test Report in the official English language and submit the same to the NCCF.
- e. Review of pilot testing reports and compilation of all issues, comments, and results of certification decisions.

Conditions for participation

- a. NCCF shall have the right to publish a report on the results of the pilot tests, which may include observations about the cost of implementation of the draft standard, as well as details about the ease or difficulty of implementation. This report shall be publicly available.
- b. NCCF will bear the travel, boarding, and logistics expenses of the auditors.
- c. NCCF will pay a per diem honorarium to auditors for the pilot testing process.
- d. No payments for participation shall be made to the observers, who have to make arrangements for their travel and logistics.
- e. All local expenses will be borne by NCCF.

EoI Invitation

Interested CBs may submit their application along with the [application form](#) and provide a financial quotation, names, and technical expertise of the auditor to the ecotourism.mail@nccf.in email address by **10th January 2022**.

NCCF after the careful review shall invite the CB for conducting the pilot testing. *For any further information please feel free to contact ecotourism.mail@nccf.in.*

Proposed Areas for Pilot Testing

The following states /divisions have been proposed by the TWG and accepted by the SDG and NCCF for pilot testing, subject to the availability of funds and concurrence of the respective sites/areas.

S. No.	Pilot Testing Site	Expected Date/week of Audit
1.	Karnataka	<i>*To be proposed in consultation with Client, Auditor & Chairperson</i>
2.	Madhya Pradesh	<i>* To be proposed in consultation with Client, Auditor & Chairperson</i>
3.	Uttarakhand	<i>* To be proposed in consultation with Client, Auditor & Chairperson</i>

Timelines

Expected start date for pilot testing - Fourth week of January 2022

S. No.	Task	Number of Days/timeline
1.	Training program for selected auditors and observers	1 day
2.	Field (Pilot) testing of the draft Ecotourism Standard	2-3 days
3.	Report Submission	7 days

Pilot Testing

The primary objective of the Pilot Testing is:

- a. Test the draft Ecotourism Certification Standard **in the field** and gather the **outcomes** including:

- i. Applicability of the standard in practice?
- ii. Problems in implementation of the standard
- iii. Causative analyses of the problems and possible solutions, including suggestions for changes in the standard.

The secondary objectives of the Pilot Testing are:

- a. To check the suitability, relevance, and adaptability of the standard in the multitude of conditions and identify the lacunae.
- b. To assess the applicability and degree of implement ability of the standard in the variant conditions and to identify the gaps in the above objectives.
- c. To identify regional variants in the adaptability of the standard and to assign specific verifiers for region-centric application and use.
- d. Contact/engagement of the disadvantaged stakeholders to solicit their comments and see the area of improvement.
- e. Supply SDG with the comprehensive report providing the area of conformance, non-conformance, and non-applicability of standard in diverse forest conditions.
- f. Providing exposure to a larger pool of potential auditors and standard implementers, to encourage familiarity with the standard.
- g. Identifying the major sections getting non-conformance during the field testing but for whom conformance can be achieved after a specific interval and changes in the practices.

Background

In India, mass tourism, also known as "conventional tourism," is primarily promoted by large conglomerates in the form of several tourist resorts or star hotels, as well as large hotel chains, which provide the same services and facilities across the country with little interaction with local communities. It often degrades the environmental quality, natural/cultural resources, and heritage. In all their operations, the environment (e.g. climate, sun, water, and sand) and the bicultural diversity – the travel industry's base products – are rarely respected, understood, or taken care of.

Eco-tourism may be defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES). Forests and wildlife are elements of nature and inseparable parts of the environment. Because of the intricate nature of the interface between nature and human beings, nature conservation must entail the participation of people as a non-negotiable component. Participation in this endeavor includes not only the forest fringe dwellers but also those who may be living away from the forests. Eco-tourism may be developed in wildlife conservation areas designated as Protected Areas (PAs) — Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves., and also in areas outside designated protected areas, which may include, forests, mangroves, Sacred Groves, mudflats, wetlands, rivers, etc.

Keeping in view, the importance of responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment sustains the well-being of the local people we have developed a Certification Standard for Eco-tourism for areas in and around the forest. A multi-stakeholder Standard Development Group (SDG) under the Chairmanship of Mr. A. K. Varma, IFS (retd), former PCCF &HoFF Karnataka, India has prepared the Draft Ecotourism Certification Standard through a consultative process, SDG meetings, online as well as regional workshops.

The Standard-Setting Process of the NCCF makes it mandatory to pilot test draft standards in the field conditions before the standards are finalized and launched for use by the certification bodies.

About NCCF

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF), came into existence in January 2015 as a registered society, comprising experts, professionals, and stakeholders of natural resources, engaged in the development of India specific and globally benchmarked sustainability standards, as its core working area, apart from working for policy advocacy, training and capacity building through multi-stakeholder engagement.

NCCF has developed the first-ever Indian scheme of forest certification that is endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), giving it global recognition. NCCF's Trees outside Forest Certification Scheme is the first of its kind and is presently under the process of PEFC endorsement. We are also developing standards for Quality Planting materials, Safeboards, Protected Areas & Wetlands, Biomass & Biofuels, and Land Degradation Neutrality. The zero drafts Non-Wood Forest Resource is also ready for pilot testing. Carbon Registry India is a major endeavor to provide a carbon trading and tracking platform for verified net Green House Gases emissions reductions and removals enhancement with Sustainable Development Contribution.