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CONTROVERSY OVER SETTING UP OF DANDELI WILD LIFE DIVISION

The Karnataka forest department is planning to set up a Wild Life Division in Dandeli. It has already passed a government order in May 1992 to establish Dandeli Wild Life Division (DWLD). Since this notification there is widespread protest in the villages near Dandeli in Joida Taluka. People are afraid that they will be uprooted from their villages. This fear has generated opposition among people. They have asked the government not to establish DWLD.

Recently I met the office bearers of Joida Taluka Wild Life Division Opposition Committee and discussed in detail about their fears and apprehensions. The details are as follows -

HISTORY : In 1956 Dandeli Game Sanctuery with 205 sq. kms was set up ~~to~~ in the region. In 1975 Dandeli Wild Life sanctuary was expanded to cover an area of 5729 sq.kms. Realising that this area being too large, the area was reduced to 834 sq.kms in 1987. In May 1992 Dandeli Wild Life Division was set up.

PEOPLES PERCEPTION : The conflict over wild life sanctuary started in 1972. The development work like construction of approach roads in the villages coming under WLS was not given permission. Till 1992 any development work was not allowed in these villages. This conflict between forest department has created a fear psychosis among villagers. In May 1992, after declaring DWLD, forest staff (WLD) went to demarcate the area coming under WLD. However the rumors started spreading, that the villagers will be evacuated and rehabitated in Bidar district. The people are afraid that as in Bandipur and Nagarhole, villages in DWLD will also be evacuated. The fear is genuine as this taluka has sacrificed 44 villages, to be submerged in Sūpa <sup>reservoir</sup> ~~can water~~. Under such circumstances the people have <sup>o</sup> ~~f~~armed

Joida Taluka WLD Virodhi Samiti to oppose the establishment of DWLD. Public Interest Litigation cases have been filed in Bangalore claiming that there will be shortage of fuelwood and bamboo for bamboo <sup>artisans</sup> ~~weavers~~, as WLD will not allow extraction of these resources. There is also fear among people that once DWLD comes into existence the activities like mining, removal of timber and other development activities, that generates employment will come to stand still. This will lead to more unemployment in the taluka. Thus, due to these reasons the people are protesting against establishment of DWLD.

#### The real issues :

The issues raised by people seems to be real, based on their past experience with forest department. However the real issue is the conflict between the Regular Forest Division (RFD) and Wild Life Division (WLD). Establishment of WLD will encompass, taking away 5 range offices belonging to RFD, Haliyal. These are the range offices that yield revenue and provides opportunity for contractors and forest officials to earn easy money. Once the WLD is established, the timber extraction operations will get <sup>curtailed</sup> ~~reduced~~ and the easy money opportunities will get reduced. In order to protect their vested interests, the timber contractors<sup>s</sup> have joined hands with RFD (RFD) and Conservator<sup>and</sup> ~~are~~ also actively involved) to create rumors among people that WLD will evacuate the villagers. It is with the support of these vested interest group that a public interest litigation against DWLD has been filed. The main group behind peoples movement against DWLD is RFD and contractors.

#### RESOLVING THE ISSUE :

How do we resolve the issue under such circumstances? People do not realise that they are being used as pawns by timber contractors and RFD. There is an urgent need to talk to villagers about the <sup>ur</sup> ~~purpose~~ of esta-

blishing DWLD. The officials should clarify whether villages will have to <sup>be</sup> evacuated. They will have to reassure that the rights of villagers over use of forest for agriculture and grazing will not be curtailed. We feel that only by interacting with people, and with active participation of villagers the WLD will be able to resolve the issue.

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December 10, 1992

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How do we resolve the issue under such circumstances? People do not realise that they are being used as pawns by timber contractors and RFD. There is an urgent need to talk to villagers about the purpose of establishing DWLD. The officials should clarify whether villages will have to be evacuated. They will have to reassure that the rights of villagers over use of forest for agriculture and grazing will not be curtailed. We feel that only by interacting with people, and with active participation of villagers the WLD will be able to resolve the issue.

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10th December, 1992.