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From: Ashok Kumar <ashok@wildlifetrustofindia.org> To <nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU>
Subject: Re: Asola Sanctuary in trouble / Date: Friday, August 10, 2001 4:31 PM

Dear all,

Wildlife Trust of India filed a PIL in the High Court of Delhi on this very issue in May 2001. The PIL has been admitted and the last hearing took place on 8th August 2001. Full details of the PIL can be obtained from us. Delhi Development Authority filed an intervention petition opposing the PIL but we are sure, we have a good case.

I have been visiting Asola WLS from 1990 onwards and I used to be a member of a committee formed by CWLW, Delhi for this sanctuary. No meeting has been held for over a year and I do not know if the committee exists. Could you please associate WTI in your next meeting on Asola.

Ashok Kumar / Wildlife Trust of India

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> From: "satya sinha" sinhasp@hotmail.com to> <nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU>
> Sent: Sunday, July 29, 2001 9:31 AM /> Subject: Re: Asola Sanctuary in trouble

Dear Vivek,

This going to be deadly plan for Asola WLS. Long back in 1990-91 when I was associated with wildlife Institute. I had surveyed the entire area and out a preliminary action plan for this area. First was just give enough protection and maintenance of the digged area to stop further degradation and egde erosion and for few years plantation in patches. I do not know what happened later. But as I know some body had recommended introduction of leopard in this area which highly populated all around. It was in real sense a un accetable thought. Otherwise due to lack of prey base it was going to be a disastrous step. Any way, this area is not going to develop if political back up is lacking. In one side expansion of estate development by big houses and on the other hand mass production country made liquior with the help of notorious mafia. So as I believe unless a mass protest made by us it going to be a concrete jungle in very near future within 5-7 years. >

Background information

The 6200 ha Sanctuary has been constantly eyed by urban planners as empty land, reflecting their narrow and short term thinking. The forest which is >a major part of the 7777 ha of the Delhi Ridge, is the green lung of the city, providing it with a multi layered canopy of the scrub forest kind, and buffering the city from the deserts sand of Rajasthan, besides being a host to a wonderful ecosystem of birds, insects and small mammals.

Denotifying this will amount to destroying the last remaining portion of the Delhi Ridge. While recognising the need for Delhi to find viable and sustainable solutions to its growing waste problem, the Forum condemns the move to sacrifice one part of the environment while trying to improve another. Besides, landfills have a huge potential to contaminate groundwater, destroy the surrounding environments owing to waste toxicity and defile the forest owing to the associated activity surrounding the landfills.

The landfill will kill the nascent forest which has only just begun to come back to life after years of efforts, since it was notified as a Sanctuary in 1991 and later as a Reserve Forest in 1996 by the Hon'ble Supreme Court after concerted citizen' action. The pits proposed for land filling are currently green and lush with vegetation. It is a forest in the making. The deep pits in the Bhatti area are ideal rain water harvesting areas, and it is an irony that while the Delhi Government is escalating efforts to increase rain water harvesting, some of the largest areas of its potential are now being turned into a garbage dump. Delhi's waste, which is a mixture of industrial, toxic household, and medical waste, will contaminate the >> groundwater, and the surrounding areas. Managing waste in Delhi needs creative solutions like large scale composting plants on existing landfill sites, promoting recycling of plastics and metals, and involving communities in collection schemes. Destroying the forest will only result in a choked and desertified Delhi, a situation that is not retrievable ever. Instead of thinking of short-term solutions, which Delhi's citizens oppose, the Government should think of creative and longer-term strategies. >>>
>>>=====

The recent moves by the Delhi government moves to push for the denotification of the Asola wildlife sanctuary to landfill garbage, shows a lack of creative ideas to tackle the problem of Delhi's solid waste. It also ignores the efforts of innumerable citizens, NGOs and the Courts who have helped protect the forest areas. Besides, landfills near forest areas have been specifically banned under the recently notified national Municipal Waste Rules 2000. While the garbage problem needs solutions, one cannot sacrifice a major chunk of the fragile 6200 hectares of the green buffer, which is part of a mere 7777 ha of Delhi Ridge forest.

Admittedly with over 6500 tones of garbage generated daily, the Delhi planner's or the municipality chief's job does not become any easier. But landfilling is not even a solution. Over 60% of Delhi's waste is just organic food matter, which is easily compostable. About 25% is sand, grit, >and 'malba,' which should be reused in construction work. The rest constitutes paper, plastics, metals and rags, a majority of which is already recycled by the informal sector. What is being landfilled is organic waste, >>completely convertible into good nutrient rich compost and sold.

All policy recommendations for municipal solid waste, including of the Supreme Court appointed Burman Committee, mandate just this: turn garbage into compost or biodegrade it biologically, not 'waste'

composts only 800 tonnes of its waste. It can adopt zonal composting with community or private sector involvement while ensuring >their viability through buy back arrangements of compost for municipal parks, >horticultural areas and agricultural use. Compost plants fail only because>no attempts have been made to ensure marketing links. Making them a success will ensure that there will be no need for huge landfills, and solve the waste problem nation wide.

The old quarry pits, being slated for waste dumps in the Sanctuary, are also major ground water recharge sources. Some of them have contained water throughout the year using water harvesting. Ironically the Delhi government itself is pushing hard to install water-harvesting systems in the city. The Forest department has used innovative water retention methods to help the arid scrub forest rejuvenate. The Territorial Army has been given over Rs 8 crores to plant saplings in the area. Delhi University scientists have successfully grown plants in the quarry rocks where no plants ever grew. Evidentially one hand does not know what the other hand does. The Ridge harbors a typical scrub forest of the fifteen million year Old Aravallis. Sheltering a unique ecosystem, with small animals and mammals under its multilayered canopy, it is coming now back to life after years of efforts. A landfill will destroy this fragile landscape littering it with plastic wrappers, rotting food and vermin. Municipality truck will pill garbage and stink amongst the forest dew and nesting grounds. Delhi's waste is largely generated by those who can afford to lead highly consumptive lifestyles. The forest however benefits all, irrespective of who they are. This is not the first time that urban planners are eyeing the Delhi Ridge. In 1998, an expressway was planned right through it, evidently to reduce traffic and air pollution. A hue and cry from citizens changed that >alignment. The upcoming Dhaul Kuan flyover wanted to devour another >portion of it, but the design had to be changed. The Vasant Kunj Ridge was to be a site for thirteen five star hotels, but NGOs and the Hon'ble Supreme Court would have none of it. The Ridge has always been seen as wasted land by >> >urban planners, while for its citizens it is their lifeline, which > ensures them cleaner air, protects them from desert sands, and recharges their groundwater. It is not something they will sacrifice. Yet this is one lesson Delhi's planners never seem to have learnt.

>> >People concerned

- >> >1. Conservator forests, Mr SS Gabriyal ph: 3376513 (0), 4649066 ④
- >> >2. Secretary Environment Mrs Khullar ph: 3392108 (0)
- >> >3. Secretary Urban Planning Mr Vivek Rae
- >> >4. Chief secretary Delhi
- >> >5. Chief Minsiter DELHI

TOI/ JULY 18

City's waste not suited for landfills: NGO Forum

RAHUL GUPTA

EW DELHI: The city produces nearly 7,000 metric tonnes of solid waste every day, all of which goes into three landfill sites at Okhla, Ghazipur and Bhalswa. Three other sites have already filled up at ITO and Hastal.

The landfills currently under use will not last long either, which is why the Delhi government is in a hurry to locate another site. And it has turned to the Bhatti sanctuary. But environmentalists say a landfill is not the only way to dispose garbage, particularly in the case of Delhi. Also sacrificing one part of the environment to protect another is hardly a lasting solution.

A spokesperson for NGO Forum for the NCR, Ravi Agarwal, says: "Most of the garbage in the city is biodegradable which should not be put in a landfill. A landfill is suitable for garbage that cannot be recycled or reused. But in Delhi, even leaves and horticulture waste is dumped into a landfill."

What constitutes Delhi's waste?

Organic waste is close to 60 per cent. This comprises vegetable and food waste from households. Then there is recyclable waste like plastic, metals and paper, which constitutes nearly 15 per cent. The third category includes construction waste like debris, sand and ash and the fourth is horticulture waste. The last two comprise 25 per cent of the total waste in Delhi.

Only 1 per cent of the total waste is made up of non-recyclable polybags, tetrapacks, wafer bags and PET bottles. A landfill is the only place for such waste.

The solution

Waste disposal has to be made easier. "We need private-public partnerships to manage waste so that disposal is made easy. In fact, if segregation is done at source, an agency can even think of creating manure through composting. This will not only reduce waste but also produce a useful product," says RK Pachauri, director-general of the Tata Energy Research Institute. But a landfill is not the right way to dispose municipal solid waste, he adds.

Agarwal says dumping garbage in a landfill is an old concept. And in India it has been misused. "In Delhi all this garbage, including biodegradable and organic waste, is put in landfills. This garbage simply lies there without decomposing. In the US, authorities found that even organic matter does not decompose in a landfill because the garbage is packed so tight. The Americans found newspapers in a landfill after 40 years which could still be read."

A town planner says many countries grind construction waste and use it as a replacement for sand in construction. "But this concept has not yet been put into use in Delhi. Finely ground debris is better than using sand in construction. And it also takes care of the garbage problem," he points out.

Summing up, Agarwal says if 60 per cent of the city's organic waste can be decomposed, 15 per cent recycled and debris used in construction, Delhi would hardly have 1 per cent garbage left to put in a landfill.

From: ravi <ravig@ndf.vsnl.net.in>

Date: Wednesday, August 08, 2001 4:15 PM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Subject: Denotification of Asola Wild Life Sanctuary (AWLS), Delhi

Date: 7th August 2001

Venue: India Habitat Centre

Present:

Ms. Bilenda Wright, WPSI, Ms Payal Narain, WPSI, Ms Bindia Sangal, WPSI, Mr. Deepak Narula, Trees for Life, Mr. Duman Roy, Hazards Centre, Mr. Hari Dang, Sustainable Development, Mr. Manu Bhatnagar, INTACH, Mr. Pradeep Malhotra, Kalpawriksh, Mr. Radha Karnath, Independent Mr. Ravi Agarwal, Srishthi, Mr. Suresh Rohilla, Independent, Ms. Usha Srinivasan, Free the Trees Campaign, Ms. Arshiya Sethi, IHC, Mr Sangeet Kumar, Indian Express,

Minutes:- Ravi Agarwal briefed the members on the situation of Bhatti Mines and issue connected to it. This was followed by a discussion among the members and the following actions were decided.

The Delhi ridge has been under constant fire for the past four years, which some project or the other being planned on it. The Vasant Kunj Hotels, the Dhaulai Kuan Flyover, the DVP 220 KV power line, the Bear Sanctuary, the Peripheral Expressway are all some of the mega projects we have managed to ward off so far. This time it is landfills. There seems to be a trend to denotify such areas for other uses, and as pointed out in the meeting this is now happening around the country.

The Ridge has had extra protection owing to the Supreme Court's and the High Court's interest in it. But owing to there not being a final notification on many of such areas, denotification of supposedly notified areas is taking place.

Hence though it may be important to give viable alternatives in this case, for garbage management to ward off the pressure, the attempts to protect the ridge should not be dependant on these alternatives alone. Basically this is not open area waiting to be absorbed by the urban planner.

1. Give alternative suggestions to the Delhi Government for waste management in lieu of denotification of the AWLS
 2. IHC to organize a debate with concerned officials on "Why Delhi Ridge Again" on September 10, 2001. IHC
 3. Awareness generation Programme among school children, media and common citizens on AWLS. A kit on Delhi ridge for school children to be prepared. Volunteers sought.
 4. More new articles will be sent to Media for coverage. IHC to help. Deepika Sodhi.
 5. Prepare a history of attack on the Delhi Ridge in the past four years. Ravi Agarwal
- Also each one of us in touch with other networks may put out this information.

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INDIAN HABITAT CENTRE

7th October 2001

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PA 81 ✓ 39

Good news on green front: forest cover goes up

SANGEET KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

DELHI is going green and in a big way. At least that is what the remote sensing satellites say. Delhi Forest Department officials say that the report on the forest cover of the country to be released by the Forest Survey of India has some very good news for Delhi.

The total forest cover of Delhi has increased by as much as 20 sqkm in the past two years. This raises the total percentage of land under forest in Delhi to over seven per cent as opposed to 5.9 per cent it was two years ago.

The report, released every two years is expected to be out in August this year. The last report stated that the total forest cover was around 88 sqkm. Now it is expected to have increased to about 108 sqkm. The forest cover is calculated by scanning the pictures taken by remote sensing satellites. Though the report prepared is for the entire country, region-wise breakups are available.

Says Delhi Chief Wildlife Warden S. Garbhyal: "We were expecting this increase because many of the saplings that we had planted initially have now grown into trees." The increase however comes with a rider. Forest Department officials also conceded that most of the rise in

the forest cover is expected in just two areas: Asola and Bhatti Mines. Notified as forest sanctuaries 10 years back, these two areas have seen hectic planting of trees in the past years. Both these areas were mines from where the red Badarpur stone was heavily extracted until a Supreme Court order put a stop to it.

Since then, these regions have seen a natural growth of trees which has been aided by the replantation efforts of the Delhi government. While Asola has almost



The cover is expected to have increased to about 108 sqkm. PURSHOTTAM SHARMA

totally regained the lush green cover that it originally had before mining began there in the '50s, Bhatti is still under development. A Territorial Army created specially for greening Bhatti is now sta-

tioned there and engaged in replantation.

Apart from these areas, a slight increase is also expected in the south-central ridge, also called the "lungs" of Delhi. The ridge in the north however does not have any space left for plantation, say forest officials.

At a time when fears are rife over depleting forest cover, the massive increase in Delhi's forest cover should be heartening. Says Garbhyal: "There is lots of scope for an increase in the forest cover in the city and our aim is to plant three lakh saplings every year." Of these at least 70 per cent are expected to survive, he adds.

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Rains save Delhi sanctuary

By Our Staff Reporter

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NEW DELHI, AUG. 16. The recent rainfall in the Capital has come as a blessing in disguise for the 2,100-acre Asola Bhatti Mines Sanctuary. The continued drought conditions and intensive heat had started having its impact as the Eco-Task Force of the Territorial Army was finding it extremely difficult to ensure the survival of the plants and trees planted to develop the site into a city forest.

Stating that the rainfall had come at the most appropriate time, the Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, said any further delay would have proven to be a setback to the greening project. The depleting ground water levels and the unprecedented heat had started having its effect on the green plantations and fears were being expressed that the project would suffer heavy damage. However, the rains, which although delayed, have come as a major relief and saved the city from ecological disaster.

The project to green the degraded Bhatti Sanctuary through the Territorial Army and the Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems of Delhi University was sanctioned in 2000-01 by the Delhi Government. The objectives of the project were to reclaim degraded Bhatti area through afforestation and grassland development, restoration of habitat for indigenous wildlife and other faunal species, improvement of ground water regime, soil quality and fertility in the area. The total cost of the project is around Rs. 8 crores and has to be completed within five years. The focus is to improve the habitat of the Wildlife Sanctuary, increase forest cover of Delhi and also act as shelter belt to check the advancing desert from the Western part of Delhi.

The Chief Minister said she had got a feedback from the officials that the survival of the plants and green grass planted in the area was at stake due to lack of rains during the month of June and July. Coupled with this, the declining ground water levels further complicated the situation. Though the Territorial Army was making all out efforts to use other means to provide water to the plants, this was proving to be an uphill task in view of the vast area and low availability of water. The project which has been progressing well was faced with the threat of being derailed by the lack of rainfall.

However, all these fears have disappeared and things are looking up now. The Territorial Army would be planting around 10,000 trees in Asola during this year and construct a dozen-odd check dams in order to conserve ground water there. The task force has been asked to take up rehabilitation of around 600 acres initially by planting more than 100,000 indigenous tree species and by sowing seeds besides taking various conservation measures. The idea is to make Asola Bhatti habitat conducive for native faunal species.

Ms. Dikshit said as part of the efforts to promote the concept of city forests, Goan Sabha land in Shikarpur area of Najafgarh was being developed as Medicinal Tree Garden. Originally this area was to be developed as a Botanical Garden. However, the soil was found to be highly sodic, compact and deficient in ground water by the Indian Agriculture Research Institute. About 50 acres were treated by planting Sesbania and the results have been quite encouraging.

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No more haze over Bhatti mines

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CECIL VICTOR

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 18

The flora is flourishing and the fauna is returning. Suddenly Neelgai (bluebull) can be seen nibbling at saplings and the elusive peacock, another pleasant sight, strutting in the rain. It seems the ecological balance is on the verge of being restored in Bhatti mines, a much ravaged part of the National Capital region.

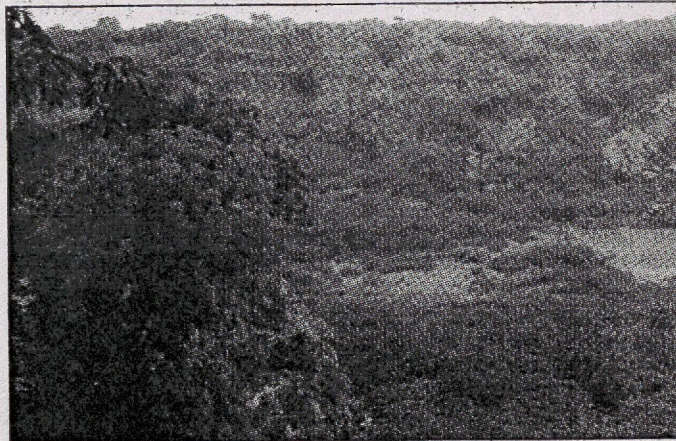
Bhatti was a cauldron of dust and devastation since Independence, feeding crushed quartzite, better known as Badarpur sand, to the construction industry in a rapidly expanding metropolis.

Even as men, women and children died in their hundreds over the years excavating rock from the open cast mines that were fed into crushers, the atmosphere was enveloped in a haze of dust. Worse, subsoil water was pumped out by the miners as they dug deeper into the bowels of the earth, depleting the groundwater resources in southwest Delhi and forcing environmentalists to seek the Supreme Court's intervention.

In 1991, about 2166 acres pock-marked with 200 pits of varying diameters and depths, Bhatti was notified as a wildlife sanctuary adjacent to the already existing Asola wildlife preserve spread over 4707 acres. Together, they will become a biosphere reserve in a portion of the Aravalli range that has been depleted and despoiled over the decades.

Drawing on a suggestion made by agronomist Norman Borlaugh to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that the military be involved in the regeneration process, an ecology task force — the 132 Infantry Battalion (Ecology) of the Territorial Army — was raised and placed at the disposal of the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi in 2001. It was vested with the responsibility of resurrecting a forest in the Bhatti mines, which was to be called the Kargil Martyrs Memorial Forest.

According to the Commandant of the battalion, Colonel A.K.Roy, within one year one lakh saplings were planted in a 600-acre area close to Delhi. Another one lakh saplings are to be planted in the next



The ecological balance is on the verge of being restored in the ravaged part of Bhatti mines

Bhatti was a cauldron of dust and devastation since Independence, feeding crushed quartzite, better known as Badarpur sand, to the construction industry.

six months in the earmarked area. A corpus of Rs 8.23 crore has been created, which is to be disbursed over five years. The Delhi government will reimburse the entire expenditure incurred by the battalion and provide saplings and expertise as well.

Currently, 141 retired personnel of the Rajput Regiment are planting between 3000 to 3500 saplings daily and have achieved 67 per cent survival rate even in the teeth of depredations by Neelgai that stray from the neighbouring Asola game park.

There is a shortage of approximately 30,000 litres of water per day and Colonel Roy has petitioned the civil authorities that saplings need to be at least 3-4 feet tall to be better able to survive. A team from Delhi University headed by Dr Babu is providing expertise for growing grass around the saplings so that moisture is retained in the subsoil strata.

Plans are under way for proper water harvesting to fill the pits so that percolation is facilitated and depletion, which was stopped by the Supreme Court order, will soon turn into replenishment. In fact,

during the recent 3-day downpour many pits had filled with rainwater, creating waterfalls at several places in an otherwise desolate landscape. The battalion has fenced off the entire area and sealed all thoroughfares. With stoppage of mining, a dust haze no longer hovers over the area, though it is still discernible in Faridabad where mining is still continuing.

In fact, the stoppage of mining in a five-km zone along the Delhi Haryana border following a court order has resulted in water returning to a disused hand-pump in Bhatti mines.

There are other impediments in the form of three colonies - Sanjay Nagar, Indira Nagar and Balbir Nagar - within the notified area and these have been asked to shift, but the residents do not appear to be in any hurry to leave.

For the men of the 132 Infantry Battalion living in the Bhatti mines is akin to living in jungles. Amenities like electricity and telephone facilities are erratic. Col Roy has asked for the installation of a transformer within the residential campus, so that a bore-well can be made functional.

Faridabad 19.9.02