सत्यमेव जयते

GUIDELINES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF INDIA'S OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES



I-OECM 2026

Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
National Biodiversity Authority







GUIDELINES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF INDIA'S OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES



2026



© copyright MoEFCC & NBA 2026

Published by
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India, in partnership with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), Chennai.

Year of publication
2026

Copyright and reproduction
This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form, for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission, provided the source is acknowledged. No use of this publication may be made for resale or other commercial purposes without prior written permission of MoEFCC and NBA.

Citation
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), 2026. Guidelines for the designation of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs). New Delhi: Government of India.

Design & Print
Xpressions Print & Graphics Pvt. Ltd.
Gurugram/Dehradun
9219552563
Doc. No-XPS2110262552

मंत्री
पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन
भारत सरकार

सत्यमेव जयते

Minister
Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Government of India

भूपेन्द्र यादव
Bhupender Yadav



FOREWORD

India has long been a global leader in biodiversity conservation, drawing strength from its rich ecological heritage and deep-rooted commitment to sustainable development.

The Guidelines for India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs), 2026 mark a significant milestone in India's conservation journey. These guidelines align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) and India's Updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP, 2024-2030), reinforcing our commitment to biodiversity conservation beyond traditional protected areas.

By recognizing and managing ecologically significant landscapes outside the conventional protected area network, OECMs create an inclusive and integrated conservation framework. They integrate biodiversity conservation into landscapes managed by Government line departments, research institutions, Government recognized local committees, while supporting sustainable development and local livelihoods.

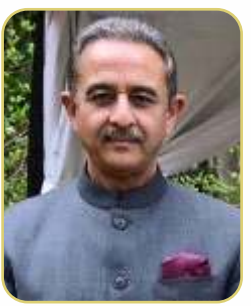
OECMs play a crucial role in contributing to the global 30x30 target (Target 3), reaffirming India's leadership in nature-positive development. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is dedicated to ensuring the effective implementation of these guidelines through broad stakeholder participation and institutional collaboration.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and National Biodiversity Authority for their diligent efforts in preparing these guidelines. Through collective action and shared responsibility, we can build a future where conservation and development go hand in hand, ensuring the well-being of both people and nature.

(Bhupender Yadav)

कीर्तवर्धन सिंह
Kirti Vardhan Singh

राज्य मंत्री
पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन
विदेश मंत्रालय
भारत सरकार
Minister of State
Environment, Forest and Climate Change
External Affairs
Government of India



MESSAGE

The conservation of biodiversity is fundamental to India's ecological security and sustainable development. In this regard, the Guidelines for the designation of India's Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs) mark a significant and progressive step forward in broadening our conservation vision beyond traditional protected areas.

These guidelines aim to formally recognize biodiversity-rich landscapes and seascapes that contribute meaningfully to conservation outcomes, even if they are not designated as protected areas. This approach supports India's implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and the country's Updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP 2024-2030), thereby strengthening our national response to global biodiversity commitments.

I-OECMs reflect an inclusive approach to biodiversity conservation by recognizing the contributions of Government line departments, Government research institutions, Government-recognized local committees, local communities and other relevant stakeholders. By integrating biodiversity conservation with local livelihoods, cultural values and diverse governance systems, I-OECMs support an integrated approach to conservation and sustainable development.

India's commitment to achieving the 30x30 global target-to conserve 30 per cent of our land and marine areas by 2030 is reinforced through this initiative. I commend the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and National Biodiversity Authority for their leadership and collaboration in advancing this critical agenda.

I urge all stakeholders including government agencies, communities, researchers, and other stakeholders to support the effective implementation of these Guidelines.

(Kirti Vardhan Singh)

नरेंद्र भूषण, आई.ए.एस.
Narendra Bhooshan, IAS

सचिव
भारत सरकार
पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय
SECRETARY
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST
AND CLIMATE CHANGE



MESSAGE

India's biodiversity is a cornerstone of ecological stability, cultural heritage, and economic growth, supporting millions of livelihoods and sustaining vital ecosystem services. Recognizing its immense value, the Guidelines for the designation of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs), 2026 introduce a transformative conservation approach, expanding India's commitment to biodiversity conservation beyond conventional protected areas.

These guidelines acknowledge the role of diverse governance structures including Government line departments, Government research institutions, Government-recognized local committees and other relevant stakeholders in achieving effective conservation outcomes. By integrating biodiversity conservation into landscapes managed under various governance models, OECMs strengthen India's biodiversity governance framework.

Aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) and India's Updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP, 2024-2030), this initiative enhances habitat protection, ecosystem restoration, and resilience against environmental challenges. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change remains committed to providing institutional support and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration for the effective implementation of these guidelines.

This initiative is a significant step toward achieving national biodiversity targets, including the global 30x30 commitment, and ensuring long-term ecological sustainability. I commend the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and National Biodiversity Authority for their pivotal role in developing these guidelines and urge all stakeholders to actively engage in their implementation, fostering a future where biodiversity conservation and sustainable development go hand in hand.

(Narendra Bhooshan)

Place: New Delhi
Dated: October 12, 2026

आशुतोष अग्निहोत्री आई.ए.एस
Ashutosh Agnihotri, IAS

अपर सचिव
पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय
भारत सरकार
Additional Secretary
Ministry of Environment
Forest and Climate Change
Government of India



MESSAGE

Biodiversity conservation is fundamental to resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and global environmental sustainability.

The Guidelines for the designation of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs), 2026 underscore India's progressive approach to integrating conservation across diverse landscapes and seascapes. By incorporating multiple governance models and engaging a wide range of stakeholders, these guidelines ensure inclusive and effective conservation outcomes.

Aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) and India's Updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP, 2024–2030), the guidelines provide a robust mechanism for advancing global biodiversity targets while supporting national socio-economic development.

I-OECMs represent an important opportunity to expand India's conservation landscape and contribute meaningfully to the achievement of the global 30x30 target (Target 3). By recognizing and supporting effective conservation measures beyond formally protected areas. I-OECMs can strengthen ecological connectivity, complement existing conservation efforts, and advance India's vision of nature-positive development.

I appreciate the team in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and National Biodiversity Authority, represented by Shri Tarun Kumar Kathula, Scientist G; Dr. A.N. Shukla, Scientist E, Dr. B. Balaji, Member Secretary, NBA and others for their valuable efforts in preparing these I-OECM Guidelines.

These Guidelines provide an important framework for recognising and strengthening biodiversity conservation efforts across diverse landscapes. I am confident that their application will further advance India's efforts towards achieving its biodiversity conservation commitments while promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

(Ashutosh Agnihotri)

वीरेन्द्र तिवारी, भा.व.से. (सेवानिवृत्त)
अध्यक्ष

Virendra Tiwari, IFS (Retd.)
Chairperson

सत्यमेव जयते

राष्ट्रीय जैव विविधता प्राधिकरण
भारत सरकार

National Biodiversity Authority
Government of India



MESSAGE

The Guidelines for the designation of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs), 2026 mark a significant step toward strengthening India's biodiversity conservation framework. By recognizing and integrating ecologically significant areas beyond conventional protected areas, these guidelines unlock new opportunities for safeguarding biodiversity while ensuring coexistence with diverse land-use practices.

OECMs provide a flexible and inclusive conservation model to achieve positive conservation outcomes. These guidelines are strategically aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and India's Updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP 2024-2030), reinforcing India's leadership in biodiversity conservation at both national and global levels.

The National Biodiversity Authority is proud to have led this initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. MoEFCC, NBA and the United Nations Development Programme have also commissioned a project under GEF-8 (OECM project) for the effective implementation of OECMs in India.

We look forward to working closely with Central and State Government Agencies/State Biodiversity Boards, Union Territory Biodiversity Councils, and Biodiversity Management Committees to ensure that, these guidelines translate into impactful action on the ground. Through collective efforts, we can further strengthen India's biodiversity governance, contribute to global conservation targets, and build a sustainable future where nature and development thrive together.

(Virendra Tiwari)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Guidelines for Identification and Recognition of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs), 2026 mark an important step towards strengthening biodiversity conservation beyond traditionally protected and conserved areas. Aligned with KMGBF Target 3 and India's Updated NBSAP 2024-2030, the Guidelines provide a framework for recognizing areas outside the legally protected and conserved area network that effectively contribute to biodiversity conservation, while promoting inclusive conservation, sustainable development and local livelihoods, and supporting India's efforts towards the global 30x30 target.

I express my sincere gratitude for the invaluable guidance provided Shri Narendra Bhooshan, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC); Shri Tanmay Kumar, Former Secretary, MoEFCC; Shri Ashutosh Agnihotri, IAS, Additional Secretary, MoEFCC; and Shri Virendra Tiwari, IFS (Retd.), Chairperson, National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), in the preparation of the Guidelines for Identification and Recognition of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs), 2026.

Special acknowledgment to Shri C. Achalender Reddy, IFS (Retd.), Former Chairman, National Biodiversity Authority; Shri Raghu Kumar Kodali, Former Adviser, MoEFCC; and Dr. Achuta Nand Shukla, Scientist E, MoEFCC, for their valuable guidance and key contributions to the preparation process.



I sincerely appreciate the contributions of the Working Group/Expert Committee on OECMs, chaired by Dr. P. V. Ramesh, IAS (Retd.), Former Special Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh, and co-chaired by Shri Bivash Ranjan, IFS (Retd.), Former Additional Director General of Forests, MoEFCC, along with the other members of the Committee, whose expertise and insights contributed in the early shaping the Guidelines.

The valuable inputs and contributions received from various Ministries/Departments, Divisions/Institutions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, State Biodiversity Boards/Union Territory Biodiversity Councils, and other stakeholder institutions are gratefully acknowledged.

I also appreciate the contributions of Ms. Nishtha, Under Secretary, MoEFCC; Dr. Ruchi Pant, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Dr. J. Soundrapandi, UNDP; Dr. Gayathri Shanbhag, UNDP/NBA; Ms. Ritu Narwaria, UNDP/MoEFCC and Ms. Kaveri Choudhary, Scientific Consultant, MoEFCC towards the preparation of the Guidelines.

The collective efforts and continued collaboration of all concerned have been instrumental in preparing these Guidelines and will contribute to their effective execution to advance biodiversity conservation in India.

Tarun Kumar Kathula
Scientist G, MoEFCC
National Focal Point
Convention on Biological Diversity
New Delhi

Dr. B. Balaji, IFS
Member Secretary
National Biodiversity Authority
Chennai

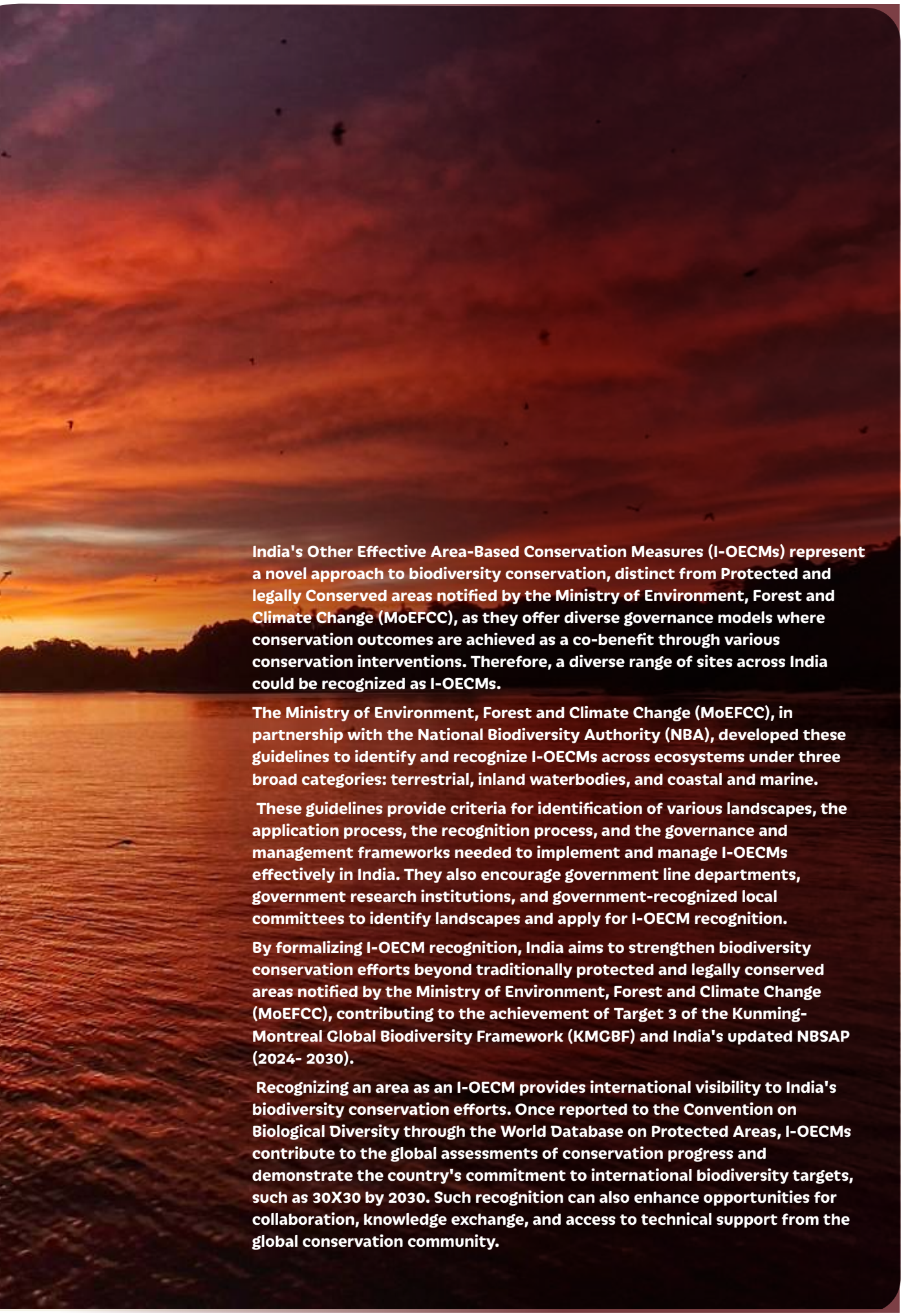


ABOUT THE PUBLICATION



GUIDELINES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF INDIA'S OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES

I-OECM 2026



India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs) represent a novel approach to biodiversity conservation, distinct from Protected and legally Conserved areas notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), as they offer diverse governance models where conservation outcomes are achieved as a co-benefit through various conservation interventions. Therefore, a diverse range of sites across India could be recognized as I-OECMs.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), in partnership with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), developed these guidelines to identify and recognize I-OECMs across ecosystems under three broad categories: terrestrial, inland waterbodies, and coastal and marine.

These guidelines provide criteria for identification of various landscapes, the application process, the recognition process, and the governance and management frameworks needed to implement and manage I-OECMs effectively in India. They also encourage government line departments, government research institutions, and government-recognized local committees to identify landscapes and apply for I-OECM recognition.

By formalizing I-OECM recognition, India aims to strengthen biodiversity conservation efforts beyond traditionally protected and legally conserved areas notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), contributing to the achievement of Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and India's updated NBSAP (2024- 2030).

Recognizing an area as an I-OECM provides international visibility to India's biodiversity conservation efforts. Once reported to the Convention on Biological Diversity through the World Database on Protected Areas, I-OECMs contribute to the global assessments of conservation progress and demonstrate the country's commitment to international biodiversity targets, such as 30X30 by 2030. Such recognition can also enhance opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and access to technical support from the global conservation community.



ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CoP	Conference of the Parties
DST	Decision Support Tool
HAC	High Ambition Coalition
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KMGBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
KML	Keyhole Markup Language
MAB	Man and Biosphere
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NBA	National Biodiversity Authority
I-OECMs	India's Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
OECMs	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
PAs	Protected Areas
SBBs	State Biodiversity Boards
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTBCs	Union Territory Biodiversity Councils
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	14
2	CBD Criteria for identifying OECMs	16
3	I-OECM Criteria adopted in India	18
4	Potential I-OECM categories	20
5	Biodiversity Components for Identification of I-OECMs	22
6	Application for I-OECM Recognition	23
7	Scrutiny, Appraisal, and Validation of Proposals	24
8	I-OECM Recognition	25
9	Governance, Managing, and Monitoring of I-OECM	26
10	Capacity Building	28
11	Incentives and Rewards	29
12	Conclusion	30
	Annexures	
	Annexure-1: Application form for I-OECM	31
	Annexure-2 : Certificate for Recognition of I-OECMs	33

1 Introduction



India is a megadiverse country harboring about 8 percent of the globally recorded taxa. The conservation of biological diversity and its sustainable use have long been traditions in India. India's rich biodiversity is being conserved and protected through various legal and policy frameworks.

Protected Areas, Reserved Forests and other legally protected, conserved and regulated areas, governed by a well-established legal and institutional framework, have been the cornerstone of India's conservation efforts. These include National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves, which are declared and conserved under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended by the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2023. In addition, geographical areas classified as Reserved Forests, Protected Forests, Village Forests and other forest categories under the Indian Forest Act, 1927/State Forest Laws.

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; Ramsar wetlands and wetlands notified under the Rules under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; and Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZs) through CRZ Notification, 2019 issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 are also legally protected, conserved and regulated. Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS), designated under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, constitute another distinct statutory mechanism for conserving areas of biodiversity significance.

India accounts for about 17.8 percent of the world's population and nearly 17 percent of the global livestock population, while occupying only about 2.4 percent of the world's land area. India is also one of the world's megadiverse countries, with approximately 1,05,244 faunal species and subspecies and 56,177 plant taxa recorded to date. A substantial proportion of India's biodiversity also occurs across a wide range of landscapes and ecosystems outside formally protected and conserved Areas notified by MoEFCC, highlighting the importance of conserving and sustainably managing biodiversity.

Further, India is committed to the KMGBF's 30x30 target and, as a member of the High Ambition Coalition (HAC), aims to achieve it by 2030. Therefore, India needs to expand its conservation efforts beyond legally protected and conserved areas. Further, several threatened and endemic species, including those of medicinal and economic value, also occur outside the legally protected and conserved area networks notified under MoEFCC. In this context, OECMs offer an excellent opportunity to protect and conserve such landscapes. Thus, 'India's Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures' (I-OECMs) is a conservation tool for effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity beyond protected and conserved areas.

OECMs have been defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as

"a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values"

(Decision 14/8 of the CBD, 2018).

For better understanding, the potential I-OECMs are the biodiversity rich landscapes other than those that are legally protected and conserved under Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Indian Forest Act, 1927/State Forest Laws, Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and Biological Diversity Act, 2002, which are being reported as Protected Areas by India to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) platform maintained by UNEP-WCMC, as per IUCN definition of Protected Area.

Identifying, recognizing, and operationalizing areas as OECMs offers a significant opportunity to recognize and report effective long-term conservation efforts taking place outside the legally Protected and Conserved areas networks notified by MoEFCC, under a range of management/governance structures, implemented by a diverse set of government entities.

Thus, I-OECMs can contribute to a more comprehensive and resilient conservation framework that benefits biodiversity across wider landscapes and seascapes. I-OECMs generate a range of benefits as given below:

i. Representing important ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity rich corridors.
ii. Promoting the conservation of endemic, rare, endangered and threatened species having medicinal and economic value.
iii. Maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services for promotion of biodiversity.
iv. Enhancing resilience of local communities against natural disasters and other possible threats of climate change.
v. Preserving socio-economic and cultural landscapes.

India initiated the development of national criteria and guidelines for identifying Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in 2020, when the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) constituted an Expert Group, in consultation with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), to develop criteria and guidelines for identification of OECMs. The criteria and guidelines were further refined through consultations during 2021, and the classification of potential OECMs was reviewed and finalized in February 2022. The resulting national framework, comprising 14 categories under terrestrial, waterbody and marine groups, was subsequently published as the "Criteria and Guidelines for Identifying Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in India". Following the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) at the CBD 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) in December 2022, under which Target 3 specifically recognizes OECMs as contributing to the global 30-by-30 target, India further reviewed and revised its OECM framework.



2

CBD Criteria for identifying OECMs

CBD in its CoP decision 14/8 (Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures) has identified the following 4 criteria and 10 sub-criteria for identifying OECMs

Criterion A: Area is not currently recognized as a protected area	
Not a protected area	The area is not currently recognized or reported as a protected area or part of a protected area; it may have been established for another function.
Criterion B: Area is governed and managed	
Geographically defined space	• Size and area are described, including in three dimensions where necessary. • Boundaries are geographically delineated.
Legitimate governance authorities	• Governance has legitimate authority and is appropriate for achieving in situ conservation of biodiversity within the area. • Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities is self-identified in accordance with national legislation and applicable international obligations. • Governance reflects the equity considerations adopted in the Convention. • Governance may be by a single authority and/or organization or through collaboration among relevant authorities and provides the ability to address threats collectively.
Managed	• Managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained outcomes for the conservation of biological diversity. • Relevant authorities and stakeholders are identified and involved in management. • A management system is in place that contributes to sustaining the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity. • Management is consistent with the ecosystem approach with the ability to adapt to achieve expected biodiversity conservation outcomes, including long-term outcomes, and including the ability to manage a new threat.

Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to *in situ* conservation of biodiversity	
Effective	• The area achieves, or is expected to achieve, positive and sustained outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity. • Threats, existing or reasonably anticipated ones are addressed effectively by preventing, significantly reducing or eliminating them, and by restoring degraded ecosystems. • Mechanisms, such as policy frameworks and regulations, are in place to recognize and respond to new threats. • To the extent relevant and possible, management inside and outside the other effective area-based conservation measure is integrated.
Sustained over long term	• The other effective area-based conservation measures are in place for the long term or are likely to be. • "Sustained" pertains to the continuity of governance and management and "long term" pertains to the biodiversity outcome.
***In situ* conservation of biological diversity**	• Recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures is expected to include the identification of the range of biodiversity attributes for which the site is considered important (e.g. communities of rare, threatened or endangered species, representative natural ecosystems, range restricted species, key biodiversity areas, areas providing critical ecosystem functions and services, areas for ecological connectivity).
Information and monitoring	• Identification of other effective area-based conservation measures should, to the extent possible, document the known biodiversity attributes, as well as, where relevant, cultural and/or spiritual values, of the area and the governance and management in place as a baseline for assessing effectiveness. • A monitoring system informs management on the effectiveness of measures with respect to biodiversity, including the health of ecosystems. • Processes should be in place to evaluate the effectiveness of governance and management, including with respect to equity. • General data of the area such as boundaries, aim and governance are available information.
Criterion D: Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values	
Ecosystem functions and services	• Ecosystem functions and services are supported, including those of importance to indigenous peoples and local communities, for other effective area-based conservation measures concerning their territories, taking into account interactions and trade-offs among ecosystem functions and services, with a view to ensuring positive biodiversity outcomes and equity. • Management to enhance one particular ecosystem function or service does not impact negatively on the sites overall biological diversity.
Cultural, spiritual, socio economic and other locally relevant values	• Governance and management measures identify, respect and uphold the cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values of the area, where such values exist. • Governance and management measures respect and uphold the knowledge, practices and institutions that are fundamental for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity.



3

I- OECM Criteria adopted in India

Consistent with the internationally recognized criteria and guidance of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), India has adopted a framework for identifying and recognizing Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs) that seeks to achieve long-term, effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity through existing governance and management arrangements. The framework provides for geographically defined areas that are not legally protected and conserved areas by MoEFCC but are governed and managed in ways that deliver positive and sustained biodiversity conservation outcomes, while taking into account ecosystem functions and services and, wherever applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values.

By building upon existing institutional, customary and other governance arrangements beyond areas protected and conserved by MoEFCC, the approach facilitates recognition of conservation outcomes without necessarily requiring the creation of a new statutory category or institutional structure for every area. It also provides an avenue for recognizing the contribution of local and community-based governance and management practices, consistent with CBD principles. The framework thereby facilitates the systematic identification, assessment, recognition and reporting of qualifying areas across diverse landscapes and seascapes outside legally designated Protected and Conserved Areas by MoEFCC, while supporting India's national biodiversity conservation priorities and commitments under the CBD and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework as well as National Biodiversity Target 3 (NBT 3) under India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2024-2030.

The key criteria for I-OECMs adopted in India are as follows:

Criteria No	I- OECM Criteria adopted in India	Corresponding CBD Criteria
I	The area is not legally protected and conserved areas under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Indian Forest Act, 1927/State Forest Laws, Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Biological Diversity Act, 2002 (amended 2023).	A
II	Government entities may voluntarily identify and submit applications for recognition of eligible biodiversity-rich landscapes as I-OECMs. Such proposed I-OECM sites must be governed and managed under Central or State Government frameworks or by government-recognized local community-based institutions such as the Panchayat Raj System, Biodiversity Management Committees, etc.	B

Criteria No	I- OECM Criteria adopted in India	Corresponding CBD Criteria
III	The area should be delineated with defined boundaries and should not be located within or overlap with an area that was already reported on the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) as a protected area by India.	B
IV	Designating an area as an I-OECM does not, by itself, entail any change in the existing activities, governance, or management regime applicable to the area, nor does it create additional restrictions or regulatory requirements beyond those already applicable under the existing institutional or customary framework. Recognizing an I-OECM is intended to acknowledge and report existing *in situ* conservation outcomes.	B
V	The proposed site would support a high diversity and abundance of native species, habitats, and ecological communities, contain threatened, endemic, rare, migratory, or keystone species; unique or representative ecosystems; important ecological processes that contribute substantially to the long-term conservation of biodiversity.	C
VI	Ecosystem functions and services, including those of importance to local communities, may be maintained and supported, taking into account interactions and potential trade-offs among such functions and services, with a view to ensuring positive biodiversity outcomes and promoting equity. Governance and management measures should identify, respect and uphold the cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values associated with the area, where such values exist. Such governance and management measures may also respect and uphold the knowledge, practices and institutions that contribute to and are fundamental for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity, including those of local communities.	D

Note:

i. Criteria I, II, III and IV are mandatory qualifications for recognition of a site as an I-OECM.

ii. However, such a site may also qualify the Criteria V and/or VI.

4 Potential I-OECM Categories



India has huge potential to identify and screen I-OECMs (India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures) across different landscapes. It leverages on existing environmental, heritage, and land-use frameworks to recognize areas that successfully conserve biodiversity outside the National Parks or Wildlife Sanctuaries, Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves designated under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (Amended in 2023), Reserved Forests under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, Eco-sensitive Zones, Coastal Regulation Zones and Wetlands notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Biodiversity Heritage Sites notified under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 (as amended in 2023).

For instance, potential I-OECM sites may, subject to meeting the applicable OECM criteria, be identified as geographically defined areas governed or managed under any existing legal, institutional, administrative, customary, or other legitimate governance frameworks across different sectors and line departments. For example, these may include areas governed under the Works of Defence Act, 1903; the Cantonments Act, 2006; the National Highways Act, 1956; Central and State University Acts and other legal instruments governing university and education campuses; State land revenue and land administration laws; the Railways Act, 1989; the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958; Municipal Acts; fisheries and marine-related legislation; and other relevant Central and State legislation, policies, and institutional or customary governance arrangements.

Such areas may be considered for recognition as I-OECMs only where they are geographically defined areas other than Protected Areas (as reported by India to WDPA) and demonstrate positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, together with fulfilment of the applicable I-OECM criteria, including legitimate governance and effective management, appropriate monitoring and, wherever applicable, the maintenance of associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and locally relevant values.

The broad categories of potential I-OECMs are:

A. Terrestrial Ecosystems (Land)

Terrestrial ecosystems that may potentially qualify as I-OECMs include a diverse range of urban and rural green spaces, culturally significant conservation areas, and other areas managed in ways that contribute to biodiversity conservation. Illustrative examples may include biodiversity parks, city gardens, sacred groves, landscapes under traditional management practices such as jhum cultivation sites, designated groups or clusters of heritage trees with ecosystem services, critical nesting and breeding sites, botanical gardens, cultural heritage sites, and suitable portions of Biosphere Reserves, particularly transition areas, where these are geographically defined, lie outside Protected Areas as reported by India to WDPA, and demonstrate positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity.

The Central and State Governments, Central and State Government institutions, other Government-recognized institutions, and government-recognized local communities may identify and undertake the preliminary screening of potential terrestrial I-OECM sites in accordance with the prescribed criteria and may submit applications for their recognition as I-OECMs through the prescribed process.

B. Inland Water Ecosystems (Freshwater)

Inland water ecosystems that may potentially qualify as I-OECMs include natural and human-made wetlands, lakes, ponds, reservoirs, irrigation tanks and other water bodies that are actively managed, restored or conserved in a manner that contributes to the long-term *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Such areas may include wetlands that are situated outside legally designated Protected Areas reported, Government-recognized community-managed irrigation tanks, traditional water-harvesting systems and other water bodies managed by local communities, Government institutions or other competent authorities, including areas managed or conserved through relevant programmes and institutional arrangements and including the requirement to demonstrate positive and sustained long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes.

The Central and State Governments, Central and State Government institutions, other Government-recognized institutions, and government-recognized local communities may identify and undertake the preliminary screening of potential in-land water ecosystems (Freshwater) I-OECM sites in accordance with the prescribed criteria and may submit applications for their recognition as I-OECMs through the prescribed process.

C. Coastal and Marine Ecosystems (Ocean and Shoreline)

Coastal and marine ecosystems that may potentially qualify as I-OECMs encompass a wide range of saline and brackish-water, near-shore, offshore and deep-sea habitats and ecologically significant features, including seagrass and seaweed beds, natural coral reefs and artificial reef structures that have developed ecological functions, estuaries, lagoons, mudflats, sand dunes, saltpans, rocky, sandy and muddy beaches, turtle congregation areas, canyons, seamounts, and other areas of marine and coastal biodiversity significance. Culturally and historically important underwater sea areas, including shipwrecks and submerged archaeological sites, may likewise be considered where their governance and management contribute to the sustained *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Potential I-OECMs may also include marine areas associated with spawning, nursery, feeding, and aggregation grounds; migration corridors and other critical habitats; and areas subject to fisheries seasonal ban areas, species-specific areas, or other resource-management measures that demonstrably contribute to positive and sustained long-term *in-situ* conservation outcomes for biodiversity.

The Central and State Governments, Central and State Government institutions, other Government-recognized institutions, and government-recognized local communities may identify and undertake the preliminary screening of potential Coastal and Marine Ecosystems (Ocean and Shoreline) I-OECM sites in accordance with the prescribed criteria and may submit applications for their recognition as I-OECMs through the prescribed process.

5

Biodiversity Components for Identification of I-OECMs



The identification of potential I-OECMs would be guided by the presence and sustained conservation of significant biodiversity components. Potential I-OECMs can be identified based on the components listed below:

1. Native species
2. Significant populations/ extent of endemic and threatened species
3. Natural ecosystems with genetic diversity
4. High level of ecological integrity or intactness
5. Sites of congregation of species for roosting/feeding and aggregations of fauna for spawning/breeding
6. Importance for ecological connectivity as part of a network of sites in larger areas
7. Restored landscapes/ecosystems.
8. Sites that contribute to maintaining or enhancing climate resilience.
9. Areas providing critical ecosystem functions and services.



6 Application for I-OECM Recognition

The application for I-OECM recognition has to be made to NBA through the prescribed form (Annexure 1) by the respective State or Central Government Departments *viz*:

- **A** A local community recognized by the Government (Biodiversity Management Committee)
- **B** Local self-government (Panchayat, Urban Local Body or others)
- **C** Central and State Government department(s), agencies or institutions
- **D** Central and State Government, academic, education or research institutions
- **E** State Academic, educational or research institutions
- **F** Any other Government entity

The process for finalizing I-OECM sites typically involves four sequential stages:

I. exploration of potential sites,

II. identification of areas that meet the I-OECM criteria,

III. making an application for suitable sites by the competent authorities in the Government as mentioned above (A to F),

IV. and their formal recognition after examination by NBA, SBB and I-OECM Committee in coordination with MoEFCC.

7

Scrutiny, Appraisal, and Validation of Proposals



1. The NBA will receive and make a preliminary examination of the applications and forward the same to the concerned State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)/ Union Territory Biodiversity Councils (UTBCs) within 30 days.

2. The SBBs/ UTBCs will make a detailed examination of the application and validate the information provided by the applicant through appropriate means. Thereafter, the SBBs/UTBCs shall send their recommendations to the NBA within 30 days after receipt of the application.

3. The NBA will constitute an Inter-Departmental I-OECM Committee to support the Authority in the recognition process.



8

I-OECM Recognition



Upon receipt of a recommendation from SBBs/UTBCs and the I-OECM Committee, the NBA, in coordination with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, will make a final decision, and MoEFCC shall authorize NBA/SBBs/UTBCs for recognition.

9 Governance, Managing, and Monitoring of I-OECM



The Central or State Government agency/Government-recognized community-based institutions that have applied for recognition of I-OECM are also responsible for managing the I-OECM site in accordance with the criteria. The NBA, through the SBBs and line departments (Central/State/community), shall also organize capacity development programs to provide awareness on I-OECM management and enable networking among sites and the exchange of best practices and lessons learned in management.

The governance framework or instrument applicable to the proposed I-OECM should be appropriate and adequate to secure the effective and sustained *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity within the area. The I-OECM should be governed by a competent Government entity or Government-recognised local community institution having appropriate authority or responsibility for the area.

The NBA and respective SBBs will maintain the list of recognized I-OECMs and maintain the best practices on managing I-OECMs to inspire stakeholders for cross learning and guide on-ground action. MoEFCC and NBA would liaise with UNEP–WCMC to publish the I-OECMs recognised sites on the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas portal.

The governance arrangement may ensure sustainable management of I-OECM to secure, wherever possible and relevant, in-situ conservation of biodiversity. This can be done by putting in place, or nurturing management arrangements like:

a. Have a spatial coverage sufficient for conserving the site's biodiversity

b. Focus on *inter alia*, achieving positive and sustained outcomes for the conservation of biological diversity by including a primary site management objective.

c. Align resource uses in the I-OECM site with biodiversity conservation goals.

d. Address existing threats to biodiversity, as well as the ability to manage new threats.

e. As far as possible, align the management inside and outside I-OECM sites.

f. Engages the stakeholders in management and fosters collaboration and coordination among them towards affirmative actions for biodiversity conservation.

g. Empowers local communities, especially women, in the management of biodiversity and ensures equitable benefit-sharing.

h. Promotes adaptive management by learning from monitoring of site's conditions and trends and integration in management decisions, and fosters learning and innovation.

i. Supports capacity development at various levels to enable mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in sectoral plans and programmes.

j. Supports scaling up and replication of successful models in I-OECM management to other sites.

k. Encourages the preparation of a management plan for achieving the objectives of I-OECM.

Each I-OECM shall have an appropriate monitoring framework, including measurable indicators for assessing biodiversity status, pressures and threats, management effectiveness, and conservation outcomes. Monitoring results shall be periodically assessed, documented and updated, with such assessment undertaken at least once every five years, to inform management decisions and facilitate adaptive management. State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) shall maintain records of I-OECMs designated within their respective States.

10

Capacity Building





The NBA, SBBs/UTBCs, and Government Departments shall organize capacity-building programs for stakeholders. These include national and regional workshops, training initiatives, and public awareness campaigns, with support from the respective line departments. These workshops and training programmes will be instrumental in strengthening knowledge, understanding, and support for I-OECMs among stakeholders.

To facilitate this process, government line departments and agencies, in collaboration with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) and the State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)/Union Territory Biodiversity Councils (UTBCs), may undertake communication, awareness, and outreach programs nationwide.

Such initiatives would promote the identification, mapping, assessment, and eventual recognition of eligible areas as I-OECMs, while fostering the active participation of local communities and other stakeholders in their long-term conservation and management.



11

Incentives and Rewards

Good practices and innovative ideas to be recognized through non-monetary programs like certificates of appreciation, exposure visits, etc.



Conclusion



The emerging framework of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (I-OECMs) presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen biodiversity conservation while complementing the existing network beyond legally protected and conserved areas. By recognizing areas that achieve sustained, effective conservation outcomes under diverse governance and management regimes, I-OECMs broaden conservation beyond conventional protected and conserved areas under MoEFCC. This innovative and flexible approach can contribute significantly to mitigating biodiversity loss, sustaining local livelihoods, ecosystem services, and enhancing ecological representation and connectivity across landscapes, waterscapes, and seascapes.

To realize this potential, it is essential to create an enabling environment that supports stakeholders in identifying, recognizing, promoting, and sustainably managing I-OECMs and by giving wide publicity to the I-OECMs guidelines. This may be achieved through the implementation of structured capacity-development programmes to facilitate the application of these guidelines, the development and dissemination of best practices for the recognition and management of I-OECMs, and the establishment of platforms for sharing experiences and lessons learned.

I-OECMs should further integrate climate-resilience strategies, promote sustainable resource use, adopt robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and invest in capacity-building initiatives to ensure the long-term effectiveness and adaptability of conservation efforts. Adaptive management approaches would be critical for addressing environmental change while delivering positive outcomes for biodiversity and dependent communities. Collaboration and knowledge exchange among conservation initiatives would strengthen resilience and optimize management practices amid evolving ecological challenges.

By fostering broad and inclusive participation, the I-OECM framework would mobilize diverse stakeholders for biodiversity conservation, cross-learning, and meaningful contributions to India's national priorities and international commitments.

Annexure 1

APPLICATION FORM FOR I-OECM

1. Name of the Potential Area to be recognised as I-OECM

- State
- District
- Taluk / Mandal
- City / Corporation / Municipality
- Village
- Others (if any)

1.1. Name of the proposed I-OECM in English / State official language.

1.2. Name of the I-OECM in native language / local dialect / tribal language etc.,

2. Designation Criteria

2.1. Indicate the Designation Criteria as mentioned as per section 3 (I-OECM Criteria adopted in India)

3. Status

3.1. Mention the legal status governing the proposed I-OECM site, if any.

4. Geographic information

4.1. Provide a brief description of the geographic location of the proposed I-OECM site. Indicate the geographical area of the proposed I-OECM site being conserved in square Meters (for heritage trees) /hectares / square kilometers, along with geographic coordinates (Latitude, Longitude), survey numbers and sub-survey numbers of the centre-most point of the site or polygon data representing the boundary of the proposed I-OECM (if available).

a. Geographical Area (in square kilometers)

b. Geographical Coordinates (Latitude, Longitude)

c. Survey numbers and sub-survey numbers of the centre-most point of the site

d. Polygon data representing the boundary of the proposed I-OECM (e.g. KML file)

e. Terrestrial/Inland water/Coastal and Marine

5. Governance and Management

5.1. Governance model and Framework: Name the level of governance model and its details for the proposed I-OECM site:

- National
- State/ Sub National
- Joint Governance
- Local Communities recognized by governments
- Government Institutes
- State Academic Research Institutes
- Central Academic/Research Institutes
- Other Government entities

5.2. What is the conservation objective as per I-OECM criteria:

5.3. Ownership Type: Specify the details of the Government departments/Government recognised communities controlling the site.

5.3.1. Management Authority: Please specify the name of the Government Management Authority/entity.

5.3.2. Management Plan: Does the proposed I-OECM site have a management framework or plan? Briefly mention the management activities carried out in the area. Please attach the document or provide a link to the document, if available.

5.3.3. Technical Partner: Please provide the details of the technical partner, if any, to support conservation and management of the I-OECM

6. Conservation Significance

Describe and list the important habitats/ corridors along with examples of Endemic, Rare, Endangered, Threatened species of flora and fauna (both wild and domestic). Indicate the conservation significance and the type of ecosystem of the proposed I-OECM site. Also, provide the details wherever applicable:

i. Important flora and fauna (including IUCN Red List species, endemic, invasive species)

ii. Associated traditional knowledge

iii. Any other information

7. Ecosystem Services

Describe the provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services, if any.

i. Provisioning (for example, food, shelter, water)

ii. Regulating (like regulation of floods, droughts, land degradation, and diseases, etc.)

iii. Cultural (educational, recreational, spiritual, heritage, etc.)

iv. Supporting (soil formation, nutrient cycle) services.

v. Any other services.

8. Supplementary Information

Provide any supporting documents on conservation initiatives carried out in the area. For example: Documents on management of natural resources, Assessment reports, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) reports, Project reports, etc.

9. Photos/ Images / Video/ Maps

Provide at least 5 photos/ images / videos / maps of the proposed I-OECM site.

10. Any other relevant information that may help in recognizing the proposed site as I-OECM:

11. Contact Details

Provide contact details of the Nodal Officer /Management Authority / entities etc., (include Phone numbers, emails)

Signature

(Name and Designation)

To

Member Secretary,

National Biodiversity Authority

Chennai

Copy to SBB (Name of the State/UT)

Annexure 2

CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION

AS

INDIA'S OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (I-OECMs)

In accordance with the **"Guidelines for the designation of India's Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures"** published by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the National Biodiversity Authority, and the State Biodiversity Board, in coordination with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, hereby recognizes the site (Name) ..... District ..... State, with an area of ..... square meters/hectares/square Kilometers, as India's Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (I-OECM).

This is issued with the approval of the competent authority.

Member Secretary,
National Biodiversity Authority
Date

Member Secretary,
State Biodiversity Board/
Union Territory Biodiversity Council.
Date

To:

Nodal Officer Name

(Name and Address of Government Department)

Disclaimer

The above recognition of I-OECM shall not be treated/understood/ interpreted as a protected area as reported by India to WDPA- UNEP WCMC. I-OECM recognition does not alter the ownership, legal status or applicable land-use/regulatory regime of the area, and remains subject to continued fulfilment of the I-OECM criteria and periodic review under these Guidelines. The designation of geographical entities in this publication and the presentation of material do not imply any opinion on the part of the Government of India concerning the legal status of any country, territory, area, or authority, nor do they imply the delimitation of frontiers or boundaries.

Notes

Notes

Notes



Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, Jorbagh
New Delhi-110003

XPRESSIONS: 9219552563 | DOC NO. XPS2110262552