



For immediate release

Tiger Matters: WCT-USAID Release Documentary on an Effective 360-Degree Approach to Conservation

NEW DELHI, November 21, 2018: Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched the conservation documentary film, 'Tiger Matters' at the India Habitat Centre. This film highlights the critical linkage between tigers, forests, river systems and humans, advancing our ecological and economic security. The film details the intricate and interwoven actions needed to secure the future of tiger habitats and local communities. 'Tiger Matters' is viewable on YouTube and will thereby provide budding conservationists, researchers, like-minded organisations and enthusiasts the opportunity to imbibe valuable knowledge. Dr. Mary Melnyk, Environmental Security and Resilience Team Leader of USAID and Dr. Anish Andheria of WCT launched the film.

'Tiger Matters' is a joint program by WCT and USAID, executed in close cooperation with the forest departments of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. This program, which aims to strengthen the protection mechanisms within and outside the boundaries of tiger reserves, began in 2014. The 'Tiger Matters' program uses a holistic 360 degree approach to conservation. The approach highlights the importance of engaging with local communities as a key component towards achieving long-term conservation goals. The film details important aspects like education and livelihood programs along with a deep scientific approach to conservation, shedding light on otherwise unknown features in the overall aspect of conservation. The event also debuts some extraordinary and rarely seen images from camera traps.

There are an estimated 3,500 wild tigers that remain worldwide and India is home to approximately 65% of them. The 'Tiger Matters' program, which focuses on the all-important Central Indian Landscape is home to 31% of India's tigers. The program provided strong evidence from camera traps for the existence of a robust tiger population outside the boundaries of protected areas. An extensive network of camera traps were placed in areas between the protected areas and mapped important tiger corridors which urgently need to be designated to ensure a future for tigers. Tigers today face immense threats, especially from poaching, dwindling prey populations and loss of habitats. Forest fragmentation caused by increased economic growth is likely to put pressure on the last remaining forests outside protected areas by hampering connectivity and escalating human-wildlife conflict.

Some of the key achievements of the 'Tiger Matters' program are highlighted below:

- Indicated the crucial functionality of corridors.
- Over 8,000 sq. km. of Central Indian Landscape camera trapped through 78,000 camera trap nights. Over 5,800 sq. km. of this was in the corridors.
- Detailed GIS mapping of 100,000 sq. km. carried out to understand the change in landuse pattern across the Central Indian landscape.
- Drove the policy for the inclusion of Pench-Kanha, Pench-Nagzira, Nagzira-Tadoba, Tadoba-Melghat corridors in the tiger conservation plans of the respective tiger reserves.
- Helped the state of Maharashtra to publish a first-of-its-kind 'State of the Tigers' report based on the extensive camera trapping exercise.
- Discovery of the Eurasian Otter in Satpura Tiger Reserve and Kanha-Pench corridor.
- Health needs assessment of close to 3,000 forest staff of the Central Indian Landscape.
- Over 46,000 children benefitted through an intensive education programme in government schools



600 rivers originate or are fed by the tiger bearing forests of our country, which in turn ensures the sustainability of millions of Indians. Tiger conservation is nothing but conservation of healthy ecosystems and free flowing rivers”.

Speaking post the screening of the ‘Tiger Matters’ film, **Dr. Mary Melnyk, Environmental Security and Resilience Team Leader at USAID**, said, *“Tigers are the golden thread of biodiversity in the fabric of all our lives. We are delighted to have partnered with the Wildlife Conservation Trust in executing a program that was instrumental in assisting the government in securing a healthy tiger population. The journey in conservation is a long one and we are committed to walk every step of this journey with the aim to ensure that generations after us have a healthy environment.*

About USAID:

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) works to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies. USAID is an independent government agency that provides economic, development, and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States. Leveraging India’s growing financial and human resources, USAID is harnessing the strengths and capabilities of both countries to tackle development challenges not only in India, but worldwide. In all sectors of its activities, USAID builds private sector partnerships to foster in-country sustainability and ownership, with a focus on issues such as health, urban water and sanitation, food security, climate change, early grade reading, and women’s empowerment.

About Wildlife Conservation Trust:

Using the Tiger as a metaphor for all of nature, Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT) was envisioned to preserve and protect India’s rich natural heritage. Currently, WCT works in and around 160 Protected Areas across 23 states in the country covering 82% of India’s 50 tiger reserves, 21% of the 769 Protected Areas, and impacting a population base of approximately 3.5 million people. WCT aims to reduce anthropogenic pressure on forests through a scientifically rooted 360 degree approach involving the multiple stakeholders such as the forest department, local communities, corporates and other NGOs, with a firm belief in landscape-level conservation. www.wctindia.org

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