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ENVIRONMENTAL CODE OF PRACTICE

Tourism Activities

National Environment Commission
Royal Government of Bhutan
August 2004



དཔལ་ལྷན་འབྲུག་གཞུང་།
རྒྱལ་ཡོངས་མཐའ་འཁོར་གནས་སྤངས་ལྷན་ཚོགས་ཡིག་ཚང་།
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION SECRETARIAT

FOREWORD

In 1999, the National Environment Commission with technical and financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) published six sectoral environmental assessment guidelines for the mining, roads, industries, hydropower, transmission lines and forestry sectors. Several stakeholder consultation workshops and seminars were conducted before the guidelines were published. These guidelines were intended to guide different project proponents through the process of acquiring an environmental clearance for their projects. The Environmental Assessment 2000 (EA Act 2000) was passed by the National Assembly in 2000 and the Regulations under the Act were adopted two years later. Stakeholder feedback and our experiences in implementing the EA Act and the guidelines indicated that there was a need to revise the guidelines in order to make them more practical and relevant to the Bhutanese context and also to streamline them with the provisions of the EA Act 2000. It was also felt that there was a need for two more sectoral guidelines for urban development and tourism as rapid developments in these two sectors was becoming a concern for Bhutan. Therefore, in 2003 the NEC once again revisited these guidelines and revised and updated them to make them more practical and functional documents. Several Environmental Codes of Best Practices (ECOPs) have also been produced to support these environmental assessment guidelines.

The NEC is grateful to the ADB for being so forthcoming with technical and financial assistance to revise and update these guidelines. The revision and updating of these guidelines were accomplished through close consultation with all the various stakeholders. We would also like to express our gratitude and appreciation to all the line ministries and stakeholders for their active participation, support and inputs. We are confident that the revised guidelines will be more useful documents that facilitate and expedite the environmental clearance process as project proponents will now have a better understanding of what information must be provided in order to attain an environmental clearance.

In Bhutan, environmental conservation has been embraced as one of the four pillars of Gross National Happiness - the other three pillars being good governance, socio-economic development and cultural preservation. However, with the expansion of developmental activities in the country, it is becoming very difficult to strike a sustainable balance between environmental conservation and socio-economic development. The number of industries is on the rise every year

while the demand for rural access to market facilities in the form of farm roads and feeder roads is increasing with every Five Year Plan - in the 9th Five Year Plan alone there is a plan to develop 588kms of farm roads. Environmental issues such as waste disposal related to urbanization are also becoming serious concerns for Bhutan. Bhutan is lauded by the international community for its sound environmental policies and the political will to implement these policies. However, environmental problems are becoming more and more visible and instruments like the EA Act 2000 must be implemented effectively to support the government's sound environmental policies and to ensure that Bhutan remains clean and green.

The environmental assessment process endeavors to mitigate and prevent the undesirable impacts of developmental activities. It is in no way intended to hamper socio-economic development in Bhutan but to guide project proponents in making the right investments in land, manpower, technology and mitigation measures to ensure that their projects have the least possible impacts on the environment. With the revision and updating of the old guidelines and the publication of two new guidelines on Urban Development and Tourism and relevant ECOPs, the NEC is hopeful that the private sector, line ministries and competent authorities under the Regulations for Environmental Clearance of Projects find the guidelines more useful, practical, informative and easy to comply with. It is the sincere wish and hope of NEC that all the stakeholders, both public and private will make the best use of these guidelines, which in turn will help in protecting our fragile ecology. Sound implementation of these guidelines will go a long way in minimizing the negative impacts of developmental activities on Bhutan's environment.



18.8.2004

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Abbreviations

CA	Competent Authority
EC	Environmental Clearance
ECOP	Environmental Codes of Practice
NEC	National Environment Commission

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ENVIRONMENTAL CODES OF PRACTICE FOR TOURISM ACTIVITIES

1 Introduction

- 1.1. This Environmental Code of Practice (ECOP) applies to activities such as trekking, camping, bird watching, and river running. Most of these activities are also covered under the Bhutan Trekking Rules and Regulation 1996.
- 1.2. This ECOP has been prepared through a series of consultations with private tour operators and government agencies. The code is available in hardcopy and in compact disk (CDs). A copy of this code is also posted on the NEC website: www.nec.gov.bt.

2 Purpose of the Code

- 2.1. This code will assist the Competent Authority in regulating ongoing or existing tourism activities. This Code is to be used in conjunction with other requirements of the Department of Tourism or the Royal Government of Bhutan.

3 Legal Aspects

- 3.1. The basis for this code is the EA Act 2000, the Regulation for the Environmental Clearance of Projects, 2002 and the Bhutan Trekking Rules and Regulations 1996.

4 ECOP - Trekking

4.1 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR TREKKERS

4.1.1 Conserve Natural and Cultural Heritage

Do not trample high altitude vegetation, do not pick any flowers or medical plants

Do not disturb wildlife and its habitat

Do not allow clients to purchase endangered animal parts or antique cultural artifacts

Support local conservation efforts and income generation activities

Avoid use of fuel wood. Use alternative fuels such as kerosene, and LPG for all cooking, heating and lighting purposes

Discourage campfires, encourage camp fun

Follow safety rules when carrying, storing and using kerosene and gas

4.1.2 Leave all Camps and Trails Clean

Separate and properly dispose off litter. Burn burnables, bury biodegradables, and carry out all other non-biodegradable materials for deposit at designated trash sites or for recycling

Use toilet tents on all treks. Set up and use toilets tents at least 100m away from water bodies to avoid water pollution

Use established campsites and kitchen sites, avoid trenching around tents.

4.1.3 Practice Conservation

Avoid fuel-consumptive menu items, e.g. baked foods and large menu selections

Re-package food into reusable plastic containers to reduce waste

4.1.4 Practice Proper Hygiene and Sanitation

Teach all staff personal hygiene and ensure sanitary kitchen and camp routines

Treat drinking water and uncooked vegetables for clients properly

Dispose off washing and bathing water well away from streams and use biodegradable soap

Take Responsibility for Staff and Porter welfare. Provide adequate warm clothing, sleeping covers, shoes, snow gear, food, stoves and fuel for the staff and porters

Periodically train staff in first aid, guiding and sanitation etc.

Address cultural “do’s” and “don’ts”, environmentally -friendly behavior, safety precautions, proper dress codes and respect for local beliefs and peoples and religious sites

Plan days for proper altitude acclimatization when ascending. Know how to identify and treat high altitude illness and how to provide emergency rescue

5. ECOP - CAMPSITES

All visitors should only use designated campsites approved by the DoT, the NCD or the Dzongkhag/ Geog

No local fuel wood should be used for cooking and bonfires

If toilets are not provided, holes must be dug in designated areas and not randomly. This is required for sanitation reasons as well as to maintain the campsite

If kitchen huts are not provided at the campsite, then kitchen tents should be pitched in designated areas, away from the main tenting area. This is required in case of fire and also for hygiene

All biodegradable waste should be disposed off in a general waste pit. Non bio-degradable waste should be carried out

Loud music and noise should be restricted to acceptable levels in consideration to fellow campers and wild life

The water source is sacred and pollution is strictly prohibited. The use of detergent and chemical related substances should be kept at a minimum so as to protect downstream users

Animals used for transport should be segregated and kept in designated areas so as to protect campers and equipment

Surrounding plants and flowers must not be disturbed so as to preserve the aesthetics of the local environment and landscape

Visitors must respect the customs and beliefs of the people in the area

6. ECOP - BIRD WATCHING

Birdwatchers are a powerful force for conservation. Therefore, we must present a responsible image to other people, particularly those people on whose sympathy and support the future of birds may rest.

Basic points to bear in mind when birding:

The welfare of birds should come first

Disturbance to birds and their habitat should be kept avoided

Never hurry to see a rare bird

Avoid playback of rare bird songs

Observation of rare birds must be reported/informed to the concerned authority so that action can be taken to protect the bird and its habitat

Avoid disturbing rare migrants

Vehicles should be parked in convenient spots so that they do not impede traffic. Birders should avoid watching birds from the middle of the road
Use an identified birding trail
Permission must be sought from the landowner if his/her land is habitat for birds
Respect the rights of people in the countryside
Abide by the Forest and Nature Conservation Act 1995 at all times
Deposit a copy of your bird observations/song record with NCD.

7 ECOP - RIVER RUNNING

The purpose of this code is to ensure that river running programs in Bhutan are safe and environmentally friendly.

7.1 Equipment Requirements

7.1.1 Rafting equipment

All equipment should be in excellent condition and subject to DOT approval. The raft and participants must be equipped with the following:

Rafts – should be self bailing, 7 chambered and at least 14 feet long

The raft should be equipped with the following: approved paddles, oars, oar frames, straps, bowlines and ropes

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) with a minimum flotation capacity of 15lbs should be provided as follows: Type V for guests, Type III for guides

First aid kit with pocket mask, gloves and wound care kits should be provided

All participants should be provided with a wetsuit, paddle jacket and helmet for rivers rated at class IV and above

1 throw bag of 60 feet or more per boat should be provided
1 wrap kit per trip should be provided

7.1.2 Kayaking equipment

All equipment should be in excellent condition and subject to DOT approval. Approved kayaks are: *Prijon, Eskimo, Dagger, Perception, Necky, Prihanna*. Other kayaks will require DOT approval. Kayaks must be maintained and equipped as follows:

Each kayak should have float bags
The kayak should be in good condition with no cracks or wear spots
On every trip, one spare paddle, a throw bag and a first aid kit should be provided

7.1.3 Professionals Required

On every trip the following professional should be provided:

A certified Expedition leader
A guide to guest ratio of 1 to 4
Minimum of 3 craft (one raft and 2 kayaks or 2 rafts and 1 kayak).
River permit issued for river, date and group size.

River permits

Every time an operator holding a commercial permit wishes to run a river trip, a river permit must be obtained from the DOT office. River permits must specify rivers, dates, group size, and intended river craft. Only approved rivers will be permitted. Permitted rivers will be those that have been surveyed and approved by the DOT for commercial operation. Survey permits can be issued for non-permitted rivers in special cases, only if the river runners' are qualified and experienced at river surveying. A write-up should be completed for each surveyed river. As of spring 2000, river running is permitted on the following rivers:

Paro Chhu from Mitzshi Zam for kayaks only, and the lower run to Chundzom for kayaks and rafts
Thimphu Chhu for rafts and kayaks
Wang Chhu for kayaks only on the upper run and for rafts and kayaks on the lower run
Mo Chhu from Tashkang for kayaks only, rafts and kayaks from Sonam's put in
Pho Chhu from Wangthankha for kayaks and rafts
Punatsang Chhu for kayaks only from Kamichhu and for rafts and kayaks from Waklaytar
Dang Chhu for kayaks only on the upper run and for rafts and kayaks on the lower run
Chamkar Chhu from Thankabi for rafts and kayaks
Tang Chhu for kayaks only

Upon issuance, river permits must be carried on the trip and if requested presented to any DOT agent or other authorised personnel. Failure to present a river permit will result in a fine.

7.1.4 Responsibilities of Permit Holders

Besides maintaining equipment and safety standards on the river, permit holders are required to adhere to certain responsibilities regarding their treatment of campsites, mode of travel, etc. The same rules that apply to trekking and touring groups apply here.

7.2 Paddler Safety and Responsibility Code

7.2.1 Safety

Basic Safe Paddling Practice

Always wear a properly fitted PFD (lifejacket) while on the water
Never go boating while under the influence of alcohol
Do not stand up in a canoe or kayak, and avoid weight shifts that may cause a capsize
Avoid weather or water conditions that are beyond the participant's skill level

Be able to effectively steer and propel a boat
Never float or paddle over a low-head (submerged) dam, fallen tree or other in-stream obstruction
Dress appropriately for the weather conditions (including both air and water temperatures)
Do not paddle alone
Inform others (friends, family, resort manager) of the proposed trip
Carry an adequate supply of food and water for the length of the trip
Learn about the route in advance, especially potential hazards
Never overload a boat with more weight or persons than it is designed to safely accommodate
Plan ahead for emergencies

Additional Safety Skills

Learn how to self-rescue in the event of a capsize
Be proficient in proper paddling techniques and learn to read the water
Only take on challenges for which you are physically and mentally prepared
Learn rescue skills necessary to assist others in your group

7.2.2 Responsibilities

Environmental Ethics

Never litter. Always pack out trash
All toilet functions must be at least 200 feet away from any water body
Pack out human waste in sensitive or heavily used environments
Do not disturb wildlife

Minimize impacts to shore when launching, portaging,
scouting or taking out
Avoid building campfires, except in DOT established
fire rings, or in emergencies

ANNEX 1

LIST OF APPROVED TREKKING ROUTES

SI. #	NAME OF THE TREK	APPROVED ROUTE
1	Gangtey Winter Trek	Gangteygonpa, Gogona, Khotokha, W/Phodrang
2	Laya/Gasa Trek	Shana, Soi Thangthangka, Jangothang, Lingshi, Chebisa, Shomuthang, Roubluthang, Lemithang, Laya, Koena, Gasa, Tamji, Tashithang
3	Bumthang Cultural Trek	Nganglhakhang, Ugyencholing, Bumthang
4	Wild East Rodungla Trek	Nganglhakhang, Ugyencholing, Phokphey, Ungaar, Taskila, Tangmachhu.Minji, Pemi, Taupang, Trashiyangtse
5	Punakha Winter Trek	Shong Pang, Dosphing Pang, Chorten Ningpo, Zomling Thang, Limukha, Chungsakha, W/Phodrang
6	Samtengang Winter Trek	Khuruthang, Limukha, Changsakha, Samtengang, Wangdi Phodrang
7	Druk Path	Jele Dzong, Jimelangtso, Simkota, Phajoding, Thimphu
8	Dagala Thousand Lakes Trek	Telekha, Japhuna, Jadula, Labatama, Genekha, Thimphu
9	Chilila Nature Trek	Chonana, Jebkarpo, Lower Mingula, Thong, Thimphu

10	Chomolhari Trek # 1	Shana, Soi Thangthangka, Jangothang, Soi Yaksa, Thombushong, Shana
11	Chololhari Trek # 2	Shana, Soi Thangthangka, Jangothang, Lingshi, Shodu, Barshong, Dolom Kencho, Thimphu
12	Lunana Snowmen Trek	Shana, Soi Thangthangka, Jangothang, Lingshi, Chebisa, Shomuthang, Roubluthang, Laya, , Roduphu, Narithang, Tarina, Woche, Lhedi, Thanza, Tshochena, Jichu Dramo, Chukarpo, Tampetso, Maorothang, Nikka Chu.
13	Dur Spring Trek	Gorsum, Lungsum, Tshochenchen, Dur Tsachu (back) Tshochenchen, Gorsum, Bumthang