

Minutes of the Second Stakeholder Discussion

Sinharaja, Kudawa – 2020.01.07

The stakeholder discussion was held in Kudawa with about 40 people present; Forest Department, ESCAMP Project Management Unit staff, IUCN and the University of Moratuwa, two media personnel from Divaina and Lankadeepa newspapers were also present, along with other local stakeholders. The objective was to inform the local community and other stakeholders about the proposed enhanced plan of the Kudawa (Donaraella-Wathurana) access road rehabilitation. The full list of attendees is in the annex.

- All participants were welcomed by the Mr Dhammika Wattegame, Forester – Sinharaja
- Mr Mahinda Seneviratne, Conservator - Environmental Management, Forest Department, then explained the objectives of the meeting. He went on to explain the historical background of the Doranela – Wathurana access road and the need to maintain it.
- He further explained the background which necessitated the appointment of Professor Manawadu from the University of Moratuwa in order to review road rehabilitation design and recommend way forward.

The audience was also reminded that the revised design for the road rehabilitation has been based on the agreements reached on the 2019.05.13 with environmental NGOs.

Presentation by Professor Manawadu

- Professor Manawadu pointed out the need for road side drains to minimize erosion (rubble packed). He further stated that these drains will eventually be covered with algae and vegetation and will be naturalized to the surrounding environment.
- He stated that the drain walls are too high and that once the rehabilitation work is completed, the road shoulders will be filled with soil and that vegetation that is natural to the area will return and naturalize the road shoulders.
- The shoulders of the road stretch between 500-550m should be filled with soil sourced from the surrounding or else the erosion will eventually damage the interlock paving.
- Road side drain between section 650-750m should be modified to reduce the speed of the water flow using rocks/rubble.
- Road section between 1000m-1050m where rock pitching has been removed need to be reinstated in order to minimize road surface erosion.

Key points discussed about the Donaraella-Wathurana access road

- President of the **Sinharaja Sumithro Organization** stated that they all agree to proceed with the balance rehabilitation work of the road. He also stated that work should be carried out in a transparent manner with the participation of stakeholders, especially the local community.
- Towards this purpose, an Environmental Monitoring Committee was appointed including the Forest Department, University of Moratuwa, IUCN, environmental NGOs and community representatives was suggested and all participants agreed to this.
- The committee was proposed to consist of the following;

- Professor Samitha Manawadu (University of Moratuwa)
 - T G Shalith (Sinharaja Sumithuro)
 - Sanath Wasantha (Sinharaja Sumithuro)
 - M T Vidyawarani (National Environment Foundation)
 - K D Tilakasiri (Kudawa Sinharaja Ekamuthu Prajamula Sanvidhanaya)
 - Suranga Buddhika (National Environment Foundation)
 - Dilani Lakmali (National Environment Foundation)
 - Dhammika Wattergame (Forester, Sinharaja)
 - Sandun Bandara (ESCAMP)
 - Nalin Perera (IUCN)
- Since the objective of the rehabilitation of the said access road is to facilitate nature-based tourism it is important to study the tourism's impact on biodiversity.
 - It was stated by IUCN that installing speed-reducing barriers in the mini waterfalls on the road side is not practical as it can block movement of fish. Further, it was recommended such proposals should be considered with the study of potential impacts to the environment. Also, it was stated that the high natural embankment which had slipped should be rehabilitated using natural stabilization methods.
 - RFO Manoj Bandaranayake requested that access for people who are disabled be provided on the access road so that they can also come and enjoy the forest. This suggestion was welcomed by the Professor and Mr Mahinda Seneviratne, and it was agreed to increase one of the tyre tracks of the design to 2 feet.
 - Mr Jayantha Wijesinghe stated that they are unaware of the activities proposed in the NBTP prepared for Sinharaja. While the PMU agreed to share a copy of the NBTP with him, it was assured that it does not contain any proposals for constructions inside the conservation forest.
 - It was stated that the information provided by existing Kudawa information centre is inadequate. The PD stated that a proposal has been made to upgrade the information centre.
 - The participants highlighted the need to appoint committees around Sinharaja who can observe/monitor all activities that are undertaken in relation to the forest. It was also highlighted that these committees need to be well co-ordinated and in that the environmental NGOs and other stakeholders require to facilitate such attempts and participate. All present agreed with this proposal.
 - Going forward, it was agreed that all developments inside Sinharaja need to have conservation as primary focus and nature-based tourism as the secondary focus.
 - The FD assured that vehicles will not be permitted on this road and the only exceptions that will be granted are for research and emergency vehicles.

Other issues that were discussed

- Conservation of the two elephants in Sinharaja and potential growth of their population
- The need to initiate committees with community participation around Sinharaja for the protection of the forest
- Agreement not to open a new access road to the forest from the Handapan ella area
- Request to the FD to implement some mechanism to regulate unauthorized entry to the forest from Handapan ella

Stakeholder Consultation Sinharaja – Kudawa Access road redesign (ESCAMP)

7th January, 2020

09.30 am

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