RESEARCHERS FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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Dear Forest Advisory Committee Member,

Subject: Potential impacts of the 3000 MW Dibang Multipurpose Project (hereafter referred to as the Project) on the bio-cultural diversity of the Lower and Upper Dibang Valley districts and downstream areas.

We express, below, some specific concerns regarding the Project and the impacts it will have on the biodiversity, landscape and local communities in the Upper and Lower Dibang Valley districts in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

1) The threat to Endangered Species – The Project involves clearing of over 5000 hectares of relatively undisturbed grassland and forest habitat which **harbour several critically endangered and endangered species**. Tigers (*Panthera tigris*) and Leopards (*Panthera pardus*), species protected under Schedule-1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, have been sighted within 5 km of the Project colony and the muck disposal area. The critically endangered Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), which is a grassland specialist, was sighted with 7 km beeline distance from the Project site (Sinha et al. 2012). Other species recorded from the area are the critically endangered White-rumped Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) and the Slender-billed Vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and the endangered White-winged Wood Duck (*Carina scutulata*). The Project site lies within an area that has been identified by the Bombay Natural History Society as a Ramsar site and is also an Important Bird Area (IBA, Islam & Rahmani 2004). The suggestion mentioned in page 78 of the Factsheet (http://tinyurl.com/Dibang-Project-Factsheet) that 'a study on survey of wildlife species in this area may be taken up by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun along with the Wildlife Management Plan' is an excellent one and we feel that this is a prerequisite before any further steps are taken.

The Project will significantly affect the following four species of fish that migrate along the Dibang river for breeding, particularly the Snow Trout (*Schizothorax richardsonii*, IUCN - Vulnerable), the Golden Mahaseer (*Tor putitora*, IUCN- Endangered), the Mahaseer (*Tor tor*, IUCN - Near Threatened), and *Chagunius chagunio*. The recommendation of the Environmental Management Plan of the Project to establish fish hatcheries for these species is impractical and may have further damaging effects on the species due to seed collection.

2) The threat of ill-planned *Compensatory Afforestation* – The Project also involves **compensatory afforestation of a relatively large area of 10,113 ha**. Compensatory Afforestation (CA) often involves converting an area with diverse native species into monocultures, as has been shown for other dams such as the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River (Bhatnagar 2004). The ill-effects of this conversion particularly for the Dibang Multipurpose Project can be expected to be higher if tree-less natural grassland habitats in Dibang Forest Division, Namsai Forest Division and Anini Social Forestry are planted with undesired native or non-native tree species. If CA is undertaken, it must be undertaken with sound scientific background. The sites must be surveyed adequately to understand the habitat type and if appropriate, native tree species should be planted.

Site Inspection reports by the Forest Department officials (in the Factsheet available for download at http://tinyurl.com/Dibang-Project-Factsheet**)** indicate that two of the three inspected divisions (Dibang and Namsai Forest Divisions) are not suitable for CA due to one or more of the following issues: 1) the site being not approachable, 2) the area being prone to flood, 3) the area harbouring moderately dense forest, and 4) the area not being free from encroachment. The third division, Anini Social Forestry Division has not yet been inspected.

3) The threat of Submergence – The Project site lies in a **highly vulnerable region** with a history of several seismic activities. The site lies in close proximity of a Fault Line in the Mishmi Thrust of the Mayudia Group in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Mishra 2009). This risk is clearly mentioned in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) document, highlighting the close proximity of the project site to the epicentre of the great Assam Earthquake of 1950, measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale, and several additional earthquakes of lower magnitude. If approved, the project will pose a severe risk to the villages and forests downstream, which could be submerged in the event of an earthquake.

4) The threat to the River Ecology – The ecology of the river basin will be severely affected since an estimated 32 lakh truckloads of boulders and 16 lakh truckloads of sand will be extracted from the Dibang River Basin during the construction of the dam. **Unsustainable extraction** of sand and boulders have been shown to have significant negative effects on water quality, river flow and the biodiversity in the river basin (Padmalal et al. 2008). Large dams and river diversions have also been proven to be primary destroyers of aquatic habitat, contributing substantially to the destruction of fisheries, the extinction of species, and the overall loss of the ecosystem services on which the human economy depends (Rosenberg et al. 2000).

5) The threat to the Local Community – The Lower Dibang Valley is currently a region of low human population density (~14/km^2); the entire population of the Idu-Mishmi is about 12,000. The influx of approximately 6,000 project staff (which is very likely an underestimate) for a period of 8 years can have **significant social impacts affecting the local Idu Mishmi tribe** as well as affect the hitherto relatively moderately disturbed habitat and biodiversity in the region.

Given these significant threats and their implications for the biodiversity, landscape and local communities, we request your intervention to ensure that clearance for conversion of forests is not given to the Dibang Multipurpose Project.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Tarun Nair (Authorised Signatory / Trustee),
For **Researchers for Wildlife Conservation**.

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