

NAWABSHAH: Water shortage, tree chopping ruin forest

By Our Correspondent

NAWABSHAH, Aug 29: The Pai Forest is facing a drought-like situation due to acute shortage of water and its wildlife is in danger due to vanishing flora and fauna and excessive hunting in the area.

The WWF Programme Coordinator, Nasir Panhwar, has said this while briefing a team of journalists from different parts of Sindh at the Pai Forest lodge, some 10km away from the National Highway near Sakrand.

He said that the dependence of local communities on the forest needed to be reduced through an awareness programme. He said issuance of licences for hunting by the department concerned and lack of proper attention had endangered the local wildlife.

He said hunting of partridges should be banned for at least two years which would help increase its population.

Nawabshah Divisional Forest Officer Niaz Soomro said that an area of 5,901 acres of land was selected for the Pai Forest in 1853. Later in 1959, 1,115 acres were transferred to the agriculture department and 145 acres to the army for the establishment of a cantonment in 1995 and presently the forest spreads on 4643.6 acres, he said.

He said that 30 cusecs of water was sanctioned to irrigate the Pai Forest through three watercourses of Rahib Shah Minor but the forest does not even get 50 per cent of the sanctioned water round the year as it was at the tail-end of the canal and influential landlords at the upper stretch of the canal steal water through machines.

He said several complaints had been made in that regard but in vain.

He said his department had recently forwarded a request to the irrigation department to sanction 10 cusecs water from Shahbaz Minor to irrigate the forest.

He said only eight out of 14 tube-wells installed during Sindh Forestry Development Project in Pai were functional but they could not fulfil the requirement.

Usama Anwar, Site manager, WWF, Nawabshah, said the main issues of the Pai Forest included the shortage of water, encroachment, illegal wood cutting, shortage of skilled staff, over grazing by livestock, hunting and poaching of wild animals and shortage of funds.

He said WWF would rehabilitate 15 sites through a 50-year vision project named "Indus For All".

He said a livelihood plan had been chalked out to manage natural resources and would be implemented through community-based organisations.

He said use of biogas was being promoted and a vocational centre for training of local women as well as an information centre was being established at Pai soon.