



Press Release

'Haathi Mere Saathi' campaign organized successfully at the 19th All India Forest Sports Meet, Dehradun jointly hosted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Uttarakhand Forest Department

Dehradun, December 21, 2011: As another step forward, to take 'Gajah to Prajah' for conservation and welfare of elephants in the country, an awareness programme was organized at the 19th All India Forest Sports Meet held at Dehradun from 16th to 20th of December 2011, as part of the 'Haathi Mere Saathi' campaign. 'Haathi Mere Saathi' is an initiative of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), to generate the support from various stakeholders for the country's National Heritage Animal. The campaign is fully guided by Mrs Jayanthi Natarajan, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests who is of the firm view that "The State Forest Departments are key stakeholders in the conservation and welfare of India's elephants. It is imperative that this nation-wide campaign garners their full support for conservation of elephants and their habitats, as also to ensure welfare of the domestic elephants". As a part of the campaign Dr Jagdish Kishwan, Additional Director General of Forests also interacted with the State Forest Departments at Dehradun during the Sports Meet.

The sports meet organized by the Uttarakhand Forest Department saw a congregation of over 2,500 forest personnel from across the country. A 'Haathi Mere Saathi' stall at the event venue, made the participants aware of the recently-conferred status to the elephant as the country's National Heritage Animal, threats faced by the species and conservation and welfare initiatives undertaken. They were also informed about the need to protect the elephants and of the crucial role of the Forest Departments therein. Reference materials including publications and documentaries on elephant conservation initiatives were distributed to the participants, which additionally included students of the Forest Research Institute, Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy and State Forest Services. 'Haathi Mere Saathi' was launched earlier this year at the 'Elephant-8 Meet' hosted by India in New Delhi that brought together eight countries representing all regions across the world that harbor elephants, as a preparatory event to the larger 'Elephant-50:50 Forum' a bigger congregation planned for 2013. The campaign mascot 'Gaju' was also unveiled during this event. "With the campaign, we are working for a chain reaction of support for the elephant in India," said Vivek Menon, Executive Director, WTI, as well as the member of the MoEF-instituted Elephant Task Force that had recommended this campaign. "Elephants have historically held importance in the conscience of Indian public as a symbol of religious and cultural significance. Yet, there has been a growing disconnect with increasing conflicts for space. The campaign will attempt to bridge this gap and bring back elephants to people," he added, and expressed gratitude for the support of the Uttarakhand Forest Department to the campaign's maiden activity.
