

Van Rakshak Project (VRP)

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Why in news?

The report released by Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) highlights crucial role of India's forest protectors or Van Rakshaks.

- **VRP** - They are also known as ***Guardians of the Wild***, is an initiative to support and strengthen India's frontline forest staff.
- **Launched in** - 2000.
- **Launched by** - Wildlife Trust of India (WTI).
- **Aim** - To build a strong, well-equipped, and motivated force of frontline forest staff across India to protect wildlife and their habitats in Protected Areas (PAs).

Van Rakshaks - Known as forest rangers, are responsible for protecting more than 1,100 protected areas and numerous other forests and natural habitats.

- **Financial aid** - Since 2001, financial aid has been provided to 367 frontline staff or their families, with nearly 74% of these cases involving fatalities.

Features of project -

- **4 key areas** -
 - Training,
 - Equipping,
 - Awareness,
 - Morale Boosting via financial support and recognition.
- **Supplementary Accident Assurance Scheme** - Offers ***immediate financial assistance*** to frontline forest staff in the event of injury or

death in the line of duty.

- **COVID-19 pandemic support** - A dedicated ***Conservation Heroes COVID Casualty Fund*** - to extended support to families of forest staff who lost their lives.
- **International collaboration** - Initially launched with support of International *Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)*, the VRP has also been extended to other countries, including Bhutan.
- **Wide coverage** - The project has supported more than 21,000 personnel nationwide through a diverse range of capacity-strengthening initiatives.
- **Training** - Focused on wildlife crime prevention, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, and basic wildlife rescue techniques.
- It also involves the provision of essential field gear, crucial for patrolling and safety.
- **Community engagement** - It emphasizes working with and empowering local communities, including indigenous groups, who are often on the frontlines of conservation efforts.

Quick Facts

“Guardians of the Wild: Supporting India’s Frontline Forest Staff” report

- **Released** - At the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, by Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.
- The report features the personal stories of 540 rangers who were killed or injured in the line of duty.
- It honors the courage, resilience, and sacrifice of India’s Van Rakshaks.
- Its findings underscore the urgent need for greater investment, support, and recognition for these frontline personnel.

References

1. [The Hindu | WTI report - Role of India’s forest protectors](#)
2. [WTI | Project Van Rakshak](#)