Van Rakshak Project (VRP)

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Environmental Conservation*

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

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