



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative

Panel Reports on Western Ghats

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Recently, floods have wreaked havoc in Kerala and Coastal Karnataka.
- In this context, the various reports on western ghat ecosystems have assumed new focus that calls for further brainstorming and discussions.

\n

\n\n

Why are the various reports on Western Ghats currently significant?

\n\n

\n

- The catastrophic monsoon floods in Kerala and parts of Karnataka have opened brought back the various reports published on the Western Ghats.
- 7 years ago, “Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel” (WGEEP) was constituted by the “Union Environment Ministry” with “Madhav Gadgil” as chairman.
- The Gadgil Committee published its report recommending actions to preserving the fragile system, most of which weren’t accepted.
- While this was due to political reasons, some experts have now opined that Kerala’s deluge was largely due to short-sighted policymaking.
- Further, they’ve also warned that Goa may also be in the line of nature’s fury eventually akin to how Kerala and Karnataka (coastal region) had suffered.
- They’ve hence asked the Western Ghats states (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil

Nadu, Goa and Maharashtra), to get together to coordinate strategies.

\n

- Further, the Gadgil Report and subsequently, the toned down Kasturirangan Committee Report on the same issue, needs to be taken up seriously.

\n

\n\n

What are the varying estimates?

\n\n

\n

- Western Ghats is spread over 1,29,037 sq.km according to the WGEEP estimate but the same was noted as 1,64,280 sq.km by Kasturirangan panel.
- The crux of the problem is in calculating what constitutes the sensitive core and what activities can be carried out there.
- The entire system is globally acknowledged as a biodiversity hotspot, but population estimates within the sensitive zones vary greatly.
- In Kerala, for instance, one expert assessment says 39 lakh households are in the ESZs outlined by the WGEEP.
- But the figure drops sharply to four lakh households for a smaller area of zones identified by the Kasturirangan panel.

\n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n

- **Intent** - Kerala's Finance Minister, Thomas Isaac, has acknowledged the need to review decisions affecting the environment, in the wake of the floods.
- Public consultation on the expert reports that includes people's representatives will find greater resonance now, and help chart a sustainable path ahead.
- The role of big hydroelectric dams must now be considered afresh and

proposals for new ones dropped considering the ecological challenges.

\n

- A moratorium on quarrying and mining in the identified sensitive zones, in Kerala and also other States, is necessary to assess their environmental impact.

\n

- **Actions** - The concerned state governments have the task of initiating corrective measures to adhere to environmental policy decisions.

\n

- This is not going to be easy, given the need to balance human development pressures with stronger protection of the Western Ghats ecology.

\n

- The issue of allowing extractive industries such as quarrying and mining to operate is arguably the most contentious.

\n

- In this context, the regulatory framework like the “Western Ghats Ecology Authority” as proposed by the Gadgil report can be considered.

\n

- Commissioning state-level units, under the Environment (Protection) Act, and to adopt the zoning systems as proposed are other aspects to consider.

\n

- These actions can help in keeping incompatible activities out of the Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZs).

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n\n

\n



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative