



Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Area

For Prelims: [Western Ghats](#), [Ecologically Sensitive Areas \(ESA\)](#), [Gadgil Committee](#), [Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel \(WGEEP\)](#), [Kasturirangan Committee](#)

For Mains: [Significance of Western Ghats](#), [Threats Faced by Western Ghats](#)

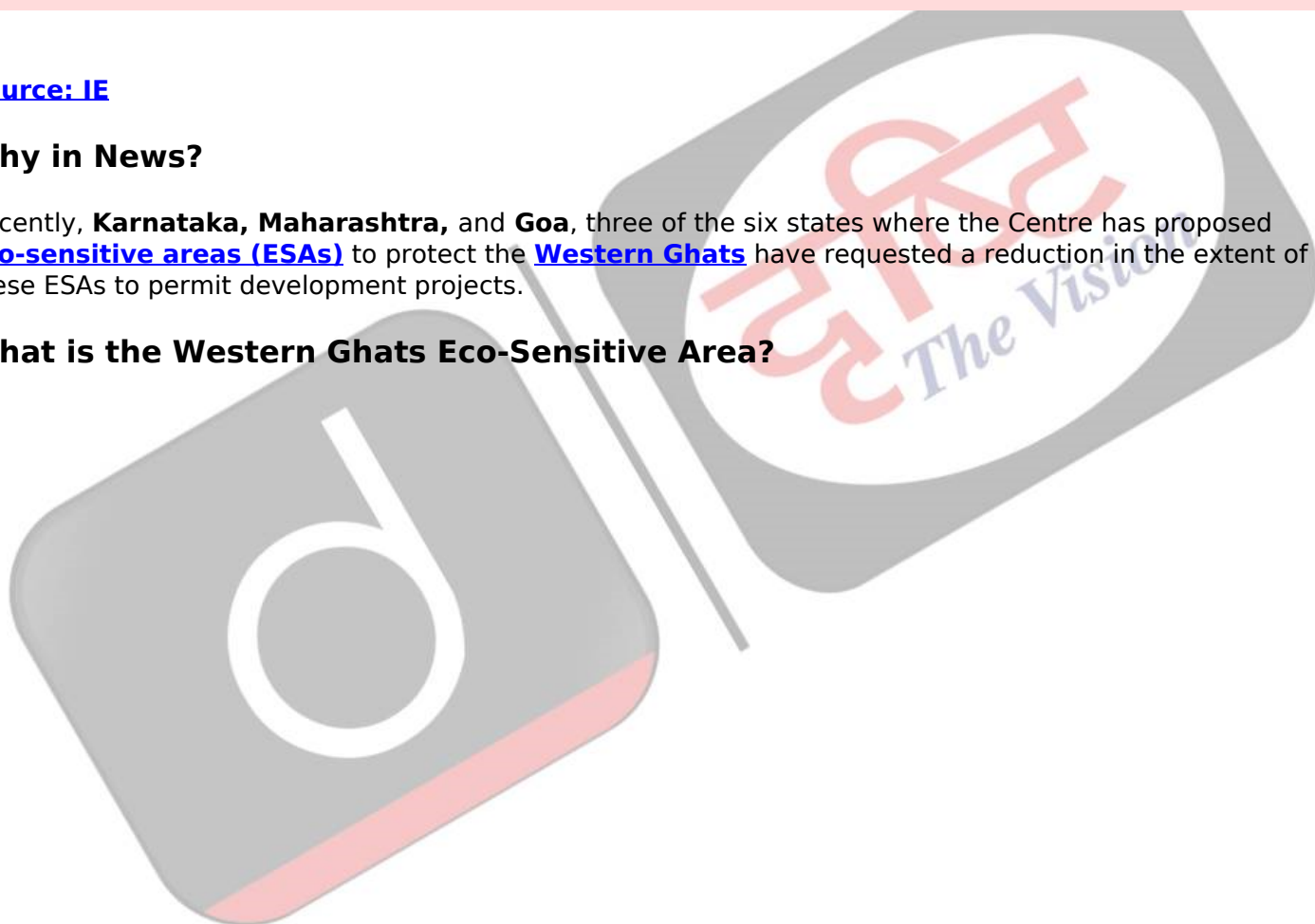
[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, **Karnataka, Maharashtra**, and **Goa**, three of the six states where the Centre has proposed [eco-sensitive areas \(ESAs\)](#) to protect the [Western Ghats](#) have requested a reduction in the extent of these ESAs to permit development projects.

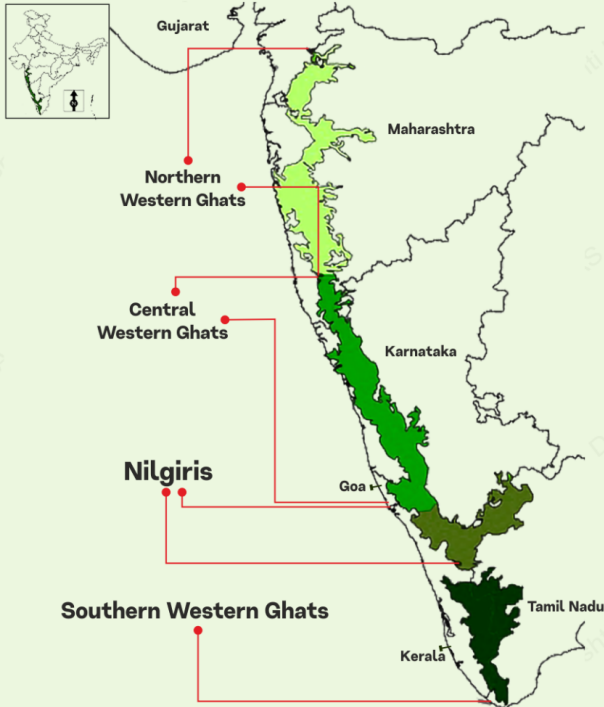
What is the Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Area?

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Western Ghats

One of the four biodiversity hotspots of India; recognised as a UNESCO WHS (2012)



Names

- ▀ Sahyadri - northern Maharashtra; Sahya Parvatham - Kerala

Diverted views about Mt. type

- ▀ View 1: Block Mt. formed due to down warping of a part of land into Arabian Sea
- ▀ View 2: Not true mt. rather the faulted edge of Deccan Plateau

Major Rocks

- ▀ Basalt, granite gneiss, khondalites, metamorphic gneisses, crystalline limestone, iron ore

Geographical Extent

- ▀ Satpura (in north) to the end of TN at Kanyakumari (in south)

Mt. Ranges

- ▀ Nilgiri ranges, Shevaroyis and Tirumala range
- ▀ Highest peak - Anamudi (Kerala)

Rivers (originating)

- ▀ West-flowing: Periyar, Bharathappuzha, Netravati, Sharavathi, Mandovi
- ▀ East-flowing: Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri, Tunga, Bhadra, Bhima, Malaprabha, Ghataprabha, Hemavathi, Kabini

Endemic Species

- ▀ Nilgiri tahr (IUCN Status - EN)
- ▀ Lion-tailed macaque (IUCN Status - EN)

Imp Protected Areas

- ▀ Biosphere Reserves - Agasthyamala and Nilgiri
- ▀ NP - Silent Valley, Bandipur, Eravikulam, Wayanad-Mudumalai, Nagarhole
- ▀ TR - Kalakad-Mundanthurai, Periyar

Imp Passes

- ▀ Thal Ghat Pass (Kasara Ghat)
- ▀ Bhor Ghat Pass
- ▀ Palakkad Gap (Pal Ghat)
- ▀ Amba Ghat Pass
- ▀ Naneghat Pass
- ▀ Amboli Ghat Pass

Significance

- ▀ Hydroelectricity production
- ▀ Influences Indian monsoon weather patterns
- ▀ Carbon sequestration (neutralise ~4 MT of carbon every year)
- ▀ One of the 8 global hottest hotspots of biodiversity (due to richness in species and endemism)
- ▀ Rich in iron, manganese and bauxite ores, timber, pepper, cardamom, oil palm and rubber
- ▀ Sizeable indigenous population (including PVTGs)
- ▀ Important tourism/pilgrimage centres

Major Threats

- ▀ Mining, Industrialisation
- ▀ Massive extraction of forest produce
- ▀ Human-wildlife conflict, encroachment, illegal hunting
- ▀ Livestock grazing, deforestation
- ▀ Large hydropower projects
- ▀ Climate change

Imp Committees

- ▀ Gadgil Committee (2011) (Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel)
 - Recommendation: All of WG be declared as Ecological Sensitive Area (ESA) with only limited development allowed in graded zones.
- ▀ Kasturirangan Committee (2013)
 - Recommendation: Instead of whole, only 37% of the total area of WG be brought under ESA + complete ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining be imposed in ESA.



About:

- In 2013, the government constituted a **High-Level Working Group** under the Chairmanship of **Dr. Kasturirangan** to make recommendations for conserving and protecting the biodiversity of **Western Ghats** while allowing for **sustainable** and **inclusive development** of the region.
 - Previously, the **Madhav Gadgil Committee (2011)** also gave its recommendations of conservation of Western Ghats.
- The Committee had recommended that identified geographical areas falling in the **six States** of Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu be declared as ESA.
 - The Committee recommended bringing **just 37% of the Western Ghats** under the ESA, down from the 64% suggested by the Gadgil Committee report.

▪ **Response from States:**

- All the involved States recognised a need to protect the Western Ghats, however, they **expressed their concerns** related to the **allowed activities and extent** of the area mentioned in the draft notification.
- These states argue for the **rationalisation of ESAs** to facilitate **development works**.
- **Karnataka opposed the K Kasturirangan panel report** which proposed 20,668 km² as ESA, **citing adverse effects on local livelihoods**.
- **Goa** also requested a reduction of about 370 km² from the proposed 1,461 km² of ESAs.

Note:

- In order to **protect biodiversity** in areas having ecological significance, **MoEF&CC notifies Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA)**, which have unique biological resources, which **require special attention** for their conservation.
- Additionally, to manage and conserve biodiversity, the MoEF&CC also designates **Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs)** around **Protected Areas**.
 - Since 2002, these zones have served as **buffers** to provide **extra protection for wildlife**, acting as "**shock absorbers**" to transition from highly protected areas to regions with less protection.

ESZs vs Protected Areas		
Feature	Protected Area	Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)
Primary Purpose	Strict conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems	Act as a buffer zone to protect nearby protected areas
Location	Designated areas with high ecological value	Established around protected areas (national parks, wildlife sanctuaries)
Level of Protection	Highest level of protection	Regulations on activities to minimise impact on protected area
Developmental Activities	Highly restricted (research, limited recreation)	Varied - some prohibited, some regulated, some promoted (sustainable practices)
Livelihoods	Local communities often restricted	May accommodate traditional practices and sustainable livelihoods
Size	Variable, can be large	Typically smaller than protected areas, up to 10 km radius

Recommendations of Committees on Western Ghats

- **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, 2011 (headed by Madhav Gadgil):**
 - **All of the Western Ghats be declared as ESA** with only limited development allowed in graded zones.
 - Classify the Western Ghats into **ESA 1, 2 and 3** with ESA-1 having a high priority where almost all developmental activities are restricted.
 - Specified the **system of governance to be a bottom-to-top approach** (right from Gram sabhas) rather than a top-to-bottom approach.
 - **Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA)** to be constituted as a statutory authority under the MoEF&CC, with the powers under Section 3 of the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
 - The report was **criticised** for being more environment-friendly and **not in tune with the ground realities**.
- **Kasturirangan Committee, 2013: It sought to balance the development and environmental protection in contrast to the Gadgil report:**
 - Instead of the total area of Western Ghats, **only 37%** of the total area to be brought under ESA.
 - **Complete ban on mining**, quarrying and sand mining in ESAs.
 - **No thermal power projects** to be allowed and hydropower projects be allowed only after detailed study.
 - Red industries i.e. which are highly polluting to be strictly banned.
 - Exclusion of inhabited regions and plantations from the purview of ESAs making it

a **pro-farmer approach**.

What are the Major Concerns of Declaring Eco-Sensitive Areas?

- **Balancing Conservation and Development:** ESAs often lie in areas with **potential for [economic growth](#)**. This can lead to **conflict between conservation goals and development projects**, with local communities potentially losing out on economic opportunities
- **Impact on Local Livelihoods:** Regulations in ESAs can **restrict traditional practices** and livelihoods of communities residing there. This can cause resentment and hinder cooperation with conservation efforts.
- **Inconsistent Policies and Implementation:** The policies and implementation of ESAs can **vary across regions and states**, leading to confusion and challenges in enforcement. This inconsistency can also create loopholes for activities that might harm the environment
- **Lack of Awareness and Participation:** Sometimes, local communities and stakeholders may **not be fully aware** of the importance of ESAs or properly involved in the decision-making process. This lack of participation can breed resistance and hinder the effectiveness of the program.

Way Forward

- **Balanced Approach:** Strive for a balanced approach that safeguards the **ecological integrity of the [Western Ghats](#)** while allowing for sustainable development. This could involve zoning ESAs with stricter regulations in core areas and designated zones for specific, low-impact development projects.
- **Scientific Impact Assessment:** Conduct thorough, **independent scientific assessments** to determine the minimum area required for ESA designation. This ensures evidence-based decision-making and minimises unnecessary restrictions on development.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Facilitate **open communication and collaboration** between central government bodies, state governments, local communities, and environmental groups. This allows for a more inclusive decision-making process that considers the needs of all stakeholders.
- **Alternative Livelihood Options:** Develop **alternative livelihood options** for those residing within the ESAs who might be impacted by stricter regulations. This could involve promoting eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture practices, and skill development programs.
- **Transparent Monitoring:** Establish **clear and transparent monitoring mechanisms** to track the effectiveness of ESAs and development projects. This allows for course correction if unintended consequences arise and ensures responsible development practices.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the challenges faced by the Western Ghats of India. How can a balanced approach be achieved in addressing these challenges?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Prelims:

Q. In which one among the following categories of protected areas in India are local people not allowed to collect and use the biomass? (2012)

- (a) Biosphere Reserves
- (b) National Parks

(c) Wetlands declared under Ramsar Convention

(d) Wildlife Sanctuaries

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. “Policy contradictions among various competing sectors and stakeholders have resulted in inadequate ‘protection and prevention of degradation’ to the environment.” Comment with relevant illustrations. **(2018)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/western-ghats-eco-sensitive-area>

