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Status of Forests in Shimoga, Central Western Ghats

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Western Ghats mountain ranges constitute the beautiful array of mountains along the western coast of India. It separates the Deccan Plateau from a narrow coastal strip along the Arabian Sea. This particular mountain range starts from the southern part of the Tapti River near the border area of the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Western Ghats mountain ranges cover a length of around 1600 km running through the states of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala finally terminating at Kanyakumari district, in the southern-most tip of the Indian peninsula. The Western Ghats is rich with different kind of vegetation and topographical features. This bioregion is highly rich with flora and fauna and is considered as one of the 34 biodiversity hot spots of the world. The stretch of Central Western Ghats ranges from 12° to 14° covering areas of Coorg district, Hassan, Chikmagalur, Shimoga upto south of Uttara Kannada. The status of forests in Shimoga was studied by reviewing the working plans, administrative reports, settlement reports and other available research papers. There are five types of forests in Shimoga district: - Southern tropical wet evergreen forests, Southern tropical semi evergreen forests, Southern tropical moist deciduous forests, Southern tropical dry deciduous forests and Southern tropical Scrub forests. The district comprises of three forest divisions- Shimoga, Bhadravathi and Sagar. The forests of the district, which yield rich and valuable products, covered an area of 4, 34,516 hectares nearly 40.27 % of the land in the district. The areas of different types of Forests are as follows: Evergreen forests- 69459 hectares (16%), Semi-evergreen- 88135 hectares (20.28%), Moist deciduous- 130612 hectares (30.06%), Dry deciduous -109539 hectares (25.21%) and Scrub Forests-24111 hectares (5.55%). The Kan forests which are most often climax evergreen forests preserved through generations by village communities of Malnadu regions as sacred forests or sacred groves and were characteristic in Shimoga district. During the field investigations, it was observed these ecological sensitive habitats are being destroyed and encroached at Halmahishi and Kullundi villages. Kans jurisdiction is under revenue department instead of forest department is the prime reason for partial or complete conversion for alternative land use. Large amount of forest were allotted to the Mysore Paper Mills for raising of pulpwood plantations. The chief sources of forest revenue in the district were the hard and soft woods and sandalwood exploited for commercial purposes. Some forest areas were cleared and assigned to the landless and other needy persons to meet the continuous demand and more land for agricultural purposes.

The study in the Kurnimakki-Halmahishi *kan* of about 1000 ha reveals the vegetation of the kan, though heavily fragmented, due to ever increasing human impacts, nevertheless, is a mosaic of



various kinds of forests. The most significant is the discovery of swampy areas within this kan which have few individuals of large sized threatened tree species *Syzygium travancoricum*, classified in the IUCN Red List as “Critically Endangered”. The tree is on the verge of extinction, and for the Shimoga district, the only occurrence of this tree is the Kurnimakki-Halmahishi *kan*.

The Kullundikan of about 453 ha has a narrow belt of original tropical rainforest dominated by the tree *Dipterocarpus indicus*, considered ‘Endangered’ by the IUCN. The revenue department in control of this *kan*, being totally ignorant of its vegetation richness has made several grants within the *kan* for cultivation of coffee and arecanut. The grantees have also done encroachments within this climax forest area of high watershed value.

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