

# DECCAN HERALD

## Withdraw shocking BNP notice

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Wildlife in the Bannerghatta National Park (BNP) and surrounding areas is under grave threat. A new draft notification issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) has reduced the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around BNP by some 100 sq km. A 2016 draft notification provided for a 268.96 sq km ESZ but the latest notification allows for just 169.84 sq km. The ESZs are transition zones between protected areas and those that are not. Activities in ESZs are regulated and thus act as buffer zones or shock absorbers to the protected national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The steady shrinking of the ESZ is worrying for several reasons. The area notified as the BNP's ESZ in 2016 was small to begin with; an Indian Institute of Science study identified 147 villages as eco-sensitive but only 74 made it to the government's draft ESZ. That

area has been reduced further and the government has provided no explanation for this shrinking of the ESZ. However, a look at the areas excluded from the ESZ in the latest draft provides interesting insights into the government's thinking. These are areas where illegal granite quarrying and sand-mining are taking place. By excluding them from the ESZ, the government aims to provide these prohibited activities legal cover. In the new draft, the width of the ESZ varies between 100 metres at some places to 1 km at others. This absurdly narrow ESZ will leave wild animals in the national park highly exposed to human activity.

Mining and granite quarrying involve dynamiting, drilling and crushing of rocks. Not only do these activities cause extreme damage to the environment but also the resulting dust, noise and increased traffic in the area disturb wildlife and put them under immense stress. These activities are already rampant in the ESZ and with large swathes of areas now being excluded from the ESZ, mining and quarrying in the vicinity of the national park will increase manifold.

The national park at Bannerghatta is home to dozens of species of animals. It lies at the end of a vital wildlife landscape linking the Eastern and Western Ghats. A wildlife corridor for migratory elephants that extends up to Nagarhole and the Western Ghats runs through it. In addition to wildlife, humans too need these forests; the BNP and the ESZ around it provide Bengaluru with valuable lung space. By cutting down the ESZ, we are choking ourselves and the wildlife at the national park. The government must come clean on its reasons for shrinking the ESZ. Importantly, it must rethink and withdraw its decision to cut down the ESZ around the BNP. Shrinking the ESZ will cause damage that will be impossible to reverse.