

# STAR OF MYSORE

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News

## Proposed Road, Railway Projects In Kodagu: HC Orders Govt. To Maintain Status Quo

**These projects will wreak havoc in the district, warns IISc. report**

Mysuru: The Karnataka High Court (HC) has directed the State Additional Advocate General and Special Public Prosecutor to maintain status quo pending disposal of the petitions filed by Coorg Wildlife Society (CWS) against the proposed Railway and Highway projects that are bound to destroy the greenery of Kodagu and threaten the existence of River Cauvery, the lifeline of South India.

Speaking to Star of Mysore, CWS President K.C. Biddappa said they had filed petitions in the HC questioning implementation of Railway lines between Thalassery-Periyapatna and Mysuru and Mysuru-Kushalnagar-Madikeri and Mangaluru and also the widening of National Highway 275 that passes through Kodagu from Mysuru via Kushalnagar, Suntikoppa and Madikeri to reach Sampaje in Dakshina Kannada.

Examining the petitions, the High Court has asked the State Additional Advocate General to maintain status quo, he said.

IISc. Report: Meanwhile, a report released by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.), Bengaluru, has warned that the proposed Road and Railway projects will wreak havoc in Kodagu. The report “Environment impact assessment of the proposed linear projects in Kodagu district” has warned the State and Centre not to meddle with the fragile ecosystem of Kodagu by implementing infrastructure and tourism projects that will ultimately prove destructive and counterproductive.

The 264-page report, a part of Sahyadhri Series, has been prepared by Dr. T. V. Ramachandra, Energy and Wetlands Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc., Bharat Setturu, S. Vinay, Vishnu D. Mukri and G.R. Rao. The study was undertaken in response to a request on March 22, 2018 by Coorg Wildlife Society.

#### Hotspot of biodiversity

While mentioning Kodagu is a hotspot of biodiversity that is rich in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, the report says that evergreen forests in Kodagu has declined by 40.29 percent (from 40.47 to 27.14) from 1973 to 2018 due to activities including rampant tree cutting and the expansion of coffee plantations. “Undertaking major infrastructure projects in Kodagu is inadvisable as even small disturbances could be catastrophic,” says the report, recalling the floods and landslides that brought in untold misery and destruction in Kodagu last year.

#### Threat of floods, landslides

The report discusses in detail projects, including widening of Bengaluru-Bantwal Road, laying roads between Halebeedu-Kutta, Madikeri-Channarayapatna and Mysuru-Thalassery Railway line. “The ecological consequences of Road expansion and Rail network plans would be immense and adverse. Irrational land-use changes will result in a poor hydrologic regime, with the catchment losing the ability to retain water, leading to floods and droughts, landslides and mudslides leading to loss of life and property,” it says.

#### Water scarcity

Increasing development will result in conversion of perennial streams into seasonal streams resulting in water scarcity during non-monsoon seasons, loss of livelihood due to lower productivity, enhanced instances of man-animal conflict, water deficit in major rivers leading to intra and inter-State human-social conflicts. All this will have a negative impact on the ecosystem.

The report identifies 300 ecologically sensitive regions in Kodagu and says that changes in land use will result in habitat loss and fragmentation, wild fires and other environmental degradations, unwarranted deforestation, displacement of people and cutting of thousands of trees affecting wild animals and their movement paths. It will also result in rampant smuggling of timber and forest goods, the report states.

IISc. report recommends:

- Forest Rights Act must be implemented in its true spirit

- Restrictions on large-scale land cover changes
- Prohibitions on environmentally disastrous projects such as river diversions (under the guise of drinking water scheme)
- No new major Roads, widening of Highways
- Encouragement to organic farming
- No monoculture plantation of Eucalyptus
- Promote use of renewable energy sources through incentive-based decentralised electricity generation
- Ban on mining, land quarrying and sand extraction
- No new licences to be given for sand mining
- Ban hazardous or toxic waste processing units
- Protect high valley swamps and water bodies

