

Printed from

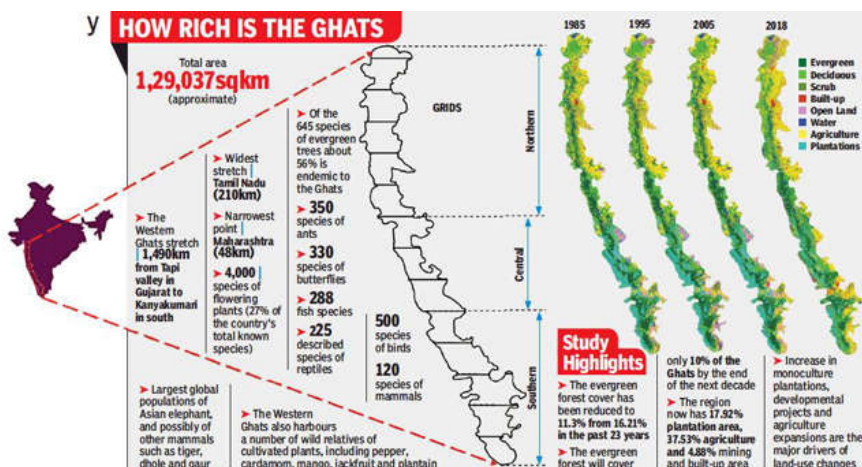
THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Western Ghats stares at a green crisis

TNN | Nov 25, 2019, 04:56 AM IST



KOCHI: A team of researchers has come out with an alarming revelation in their new study that the evergreen forest cover of the Western Ghats is set to reduce by a mere 10% and this may cause severe ecological crisis. The study by a team of researchers -- T V Ramachandra, director, Centre for Ecological studies, IISC Bengaluru, and S Bharath, Centre for Sustainable Technologies -- pointed out that the reason for this depletion was largely due to anthropogenic pressure.



States like Kerala had shifted to monocrop plantations, cutting down large areas of forest land to plant acacia, eucalyptus, teak and rubber that changed the forest landscape of Kerala in the last four decades. The study said that large-scale change in land-use pattern led to deforestation. This contributed to 20-25% of carbon emissions that had regional impacts on climate patterns, altering the hydrological regime in the Western Ghats region.

The latest data released by Kerala forest department said there was 300% increase in man-animal conflict in the past two years due to fragmentation of forest corridors and loss of vegetation.

The state government, even after 2018 floods, bowed to the pressure of mining lobby and withdrew a Supreme Court guideline against permitting quarrying within 10km of forest borders. There are six quarries operating in every panchayat and around 50% of the quarries are located in ecologically sensitive zones, as per the Kerala Forest Research Institute study.

"This means there can be severe issue of water scarcity and increase in temperature in the Western Ghats region, which can adversely affect the crop production," V S Vijayan, former chairman of state biodiversity board said.

The study by Ramachandra and Bharath also pointed out that the changes in land use pattern was the prime driver of climate change. "The Western Ghats are one among 36 global biodiversity hotspots and forests in this region sequester atmospheric carbon, which aid in moderating the global climate and sustaining water to ensure water and food security in the peninsular India," the study said.

The immediate effect of deforestation, the study said, was the increase in carbon load in the atmosphere, and its cumulative impacts are global warming, changes in the climate and ecosystem degradation. “The loss of forest cover has modified local rainfall with consequences of extreme weather conditions. The deforestation across the region has consequences of delay in the onset of monsoon and decline in the number of rainy days with higher dry conditions,” the study added.

“Additionally, persistent drier conditions in a region can aggravate the probability of tropical evergreen forest to transform to dry forest and savannah,” the study noted.