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# 'Union and state governments should take steps to save Western Ghats'

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Coimbatore: The three-day national-level ecological festival for saving the Western Ghats came to an end in the city on Sunday with a declaration on the 'Future of the Western Ghats Mountain Ecosystem'. It was issued at the ninth conference of the 'Save the Western Ghats Movement' held as part of the festival.

The declaration said the Western Ghats, one of eight biodiversity hotspots, had been left to its fate by both the central government and the six state governments, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat which host one part or another of this huge mountain ecosystem.

The declaration said the Union and state governments had abandoned the recommendations of the reports of two expert committees set up by the ministry of environment, forests and climate change. "These recommendations required the governments to install some serious and urgent form of legal protection under the provisions of the Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986, which would halt the steady degradation of the mountain chain that has taken place over the past decades before it became irreversible," it said. "Ironically, the decision to abandon the Ghats ecosystem has come a couple of months after extensive flooding during monsoon rainfall in 2018," it added.

"We declare that we oppose the extremely narrow and limited legal protection that the EPA notification affords to the Western Ghats. We declare that we are opposed to (and will oppose) all environmentally destructive projects that, without doubt, will harm the ghats ecosystem and push it beyond recovery and rehabilitation. We do not want any more studies. All we now want is action," it said.

Enumerating the destruction caused to the mountain system, the declaration said several species were reaching extinction and reckless road development has led to road kills. It added that introduction of wire mesh fencing has killed sambhar and deer.

The festival, held at Sri Krishna College of Arts and Science, included photo exhibitions, discussions, speeches, a Gaj Yatra and cultural events.