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INDIA

57,000 Sq Km Of Western Ghats Notified As Ecologically Sensitive Area, Construction And Mining Banned



Bobins Abraham | Updated: Oct 16, 2018, 11:37 AM IST

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In a major victory to the efforts to protect UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) has notified 56,825 sq km of the Western Ghats spread along a 15,000km in six states as ecologically sensitive area (ESA).

The draft notification, if it gets final clearance, will ban activities including constructions, mining, quarrying and sand mining.

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The final notification will be issued after 60 days following the submission of objections or suggestions. The six state Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Kerala and Gujarat are likely to seek modifications to the notification.

So far Karnataka has made it clear that it won't accept the notification as, "It will have an adverse effect on state's economy."

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Goa, where a total of 1,461 sq km of the Western Ghats area including 99 villages has been earlier been identified

as ESA is also likely to seek to exempt at least some parts from the final draft.

Earlier, following the recent Kerala floods, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had restricted six states from giving environmental clearance for activities that could harm eco-sensitive areas.



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In 2011, a committee headed by ecologist Madhav Gadgil, had recommended 64% of the area come under ESA, but it was dropped after protests from various states.

Another expert committee, in 2013 headed by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan had suggested that 37 per cent (60,000 hectares) of the Western Ghats should be declared as ESA. This too was not implemented.



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The calls to declare the Western Ghats as ESA got louder recently after the Kerala floods. Many environmental experts including Gadgil had blamed it on the rampant destruction of the Western Ghats and the mindless construction and mining activities in ecological fragile areas in the state.

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Western Ghats, also known as Sahyadri which sprawls across six states over a distance of approximately 1,500 kilometres from Tapti river in the north to Kanyakumari in the south is considered a treasure trove of rare flora and fauna including 7,402 species of flowering plants, 1,814 species of non-flowering plants, 139 mammal species, 508 bird species, 179 amphibian species, 6,000 insects species and 290 freshwater fish species.

In 2012 it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of the eight "hottest hot-spots" of biological diversity in the world.