

Paradise lost! Drastic fall in forest cover of Western Ghats; only 10% to remain in coming decade

In Focus

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The study has been conducted by the TV Ramachandra, director, Centre for Ecological Studies, Indian Institute of Science-Bangalore and S Bharath Centre for Sustainable Technologies.

The ghats are home to several illegal environmental activities which include - mining, quarrying, thermal power plants and highly polluting industries | Photo Credit: Getty Images



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

. The study highlighted the urgent need to conserve the last remaining core forest areas in the region

The study warned Kerala against the backdrop of state facing floods and landslides in two consecutive years

The Western Ghats region had 16.21 per cent evergreen forest cover in 1985

The researchers had used

Kochi: A recently published study revealed that the evergreen forest cover in the Western Ghats is set to decrease drastically and will touch an abysmal 10 per cent in 10 years.

The study has been conducted by the TV Ramachandra, director, Centre for Ecological Studies, Indian Institute of Science-Bangalore and S Bharath Centre for Sustainable Technologies. The study highlighted the urgent need to conserve the last remaining core forest areas in the region, it also warned Kerala against the backdrop of state facing floods and landslides in two consecutive years.

Ramachandra told a media [outlet](#), the increase in monoculture plantations such as acacia, eucalyptus, teak, rubber, developmental projects and agriculture expansions are the major drivers of land-use changes. The result is that the edges of the forest are becoming more prominent due to sustained anthropogenic pressure.

Reportedly, the researchers have made a detailed study on the change in forest cover over the past 23 years. The Western Ghats region had 16.21 per cent evergreen forest cover in 1985, which was reduced to 11.3 per cent in 2018. Now, the region has 17.92 per cent plantation area, 37.53 per cent agriculture and 4.88 per cent mining and built-up area.

The researchers had used modern scientific tools- spatial analyses of land-use dynamics, modelling and assessment of climate variability. This was done to quantify the carbon sequestration potential of the Western Ghats and climate variation in the area and the adjoining area.

The ghats are home to several illegal environmental activities which include - mining, quarrying, thermal power plants and highly polluting industries. While ghats are also a major source of livelihood for the indigenous population, illegal activities by the local industries harm the environment as well as the local inhabitants. Coping with the growing population, several terrains of the ghats are being used for the real estate. While the population here depends on agriculture in the area, fertilizer runoff is causing pollution in the rivers.

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