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Forest loss in Karnataka's Western Ghats region alarming: Report

TNN / Updated: Dec 25, 2024, 13:28 IST

The India State of Forest Report 2023 highlights severe degradation of dense evergreen forests in four of Karnataka's 10 Western Ghats districts, including Shivamogga and Belagavi. The report attributes the significant loss of forest cover to rampant



Four out of ten districts have seen significant forest cover loss, with Shivamogga and Belagavi...

BENGALURU: Amid mounting opposition to the recommendations of the Kasturirangan report and a slew of projects planned along the Western Ghats area of Karnataka, the latest India State of Forest Report (ISFR) paints a grim picture of the state of forest cover along the ecologically sensitive region.

Severe degradation of dense evergreen forests in four of the 10 Western Ghats districts of Karnataka has set off alarm bells in conservation circles.

LOSS & GAIN OF GREEN COVER

Western Ghats districts	Extent of forest lost/improved
Belagavi	-24.9 sqkm
Chamaraja Nagar	-3.3 sqkm
Chikkamagaluru	77.6 sqkm
Kodagu	33.4 sqkm
Dakshina Kannada	12.1 sqkm
Hassan	2.5 sqkm
Mysuru	-15.3 sqkm
Shivamogga	-74.5 sqkm
Udupi	68.5 sqkm
Uttara Kannada	160.6 sqkm

Shivamogga – where the govt is aggressively pushing for a pumped storage project, widening of highways, and mini-hydel units – has witnessed rampant destruction of forest cover. A total of 74.5 sqkm of forest cover in Shivamogga has been lost, shows the ISFR-2023 report

“There is severe degradation of forest cover over the past decade along the ghats. The loss in forest cover is largely attributed to rampant encroachment and settlements under the Forest Rights Act – A senior forest official

DEPLETING TREASURE: Four of 10 Western Ghats districts have seen decline in forest area

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According to ISFR 2023 released by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEF&CC), of the six states through which the Western Ghats runs, Karnataka accounts for highest land spread (over 16,114 sqkm). Acknowledged as one of the world's most biologically diverse hotspots, the mountain range was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2012. While the very dense forest (VDF) cover has shot up by 3,465.1 sqkm, both moderately dense cover (1,043.2 sqkm) and open forest cover (2,480 sqkm) in the region have dropped significantly.

Karnataka presents a similar picture, suffering both setbacks and gains in the region's forest cover. As per the report, four of the 10 Western Ghats districts in the state witnessed severe loss of forest cover, bringing the spotlight back on the recommendations of the Kasturirangan report and reconsideration of multiple projects the state govt has pursued in the past few years in the region. In fact, Shivamogga — where the govt is aggressively pushing for a pumped storage project, widening of highways, and mini-hydel units — has witnessed rampant destruction of forest cover. A total of 74.5 sqkm of forest cover in Shivamogga has been lost, the report revealed.

Close on the heels of Shivamogga is Belagavi district with a loss of 24.9 sqkm. In Belagavi, the state govt is "bargaining" over a deal with Goa for the implementation of the Mahadayi water project in exchange for land for the latter state's power transmission project.

Senior Karnataka forest officials acknowledged the severe degradation of forest cover over the past decade along the ghats. The loss in forest cover is largely attributed to rampant encroachment and settlements under the Forest Rights Act, an official explained.

The districts of Mysuru (15.2 sqkm) and Chamarajanagar (3.3 sqkm), which have renowned tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries, also have lost considerable forest cover, as per the MoEF&CC report.

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