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## Infra projects may affect Western Ghats' ecology

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Mangalore, Feb. 14:

Experts at a public consultation meeting on “Ecologically sensitive areas of Western Ghats region” have expressed concern over the impact of major infrastructure and industrial projects on the Western Ghats.

The public meet for Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts was jointly organised by the Western Ghats Task Force of Karnataka, the Karnataka Forest Department, and the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, here on Monday.

Dr H.C. Sharathchandra, former Chairman of the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, said that any major project in the ecologically sensitive areas will lead to the beginning of the end in such regions. A proper survey of the botanical and zoological wealth of Western Ghat region is essential for preparing a database on the ecologically sensitive areas in the region, he said.

Dr N.A. Madhyastha, former Principal of Poornaprajna College, Udupi, said that Western Ghat region is home to many species of snails. Stating that each species has its own micro habitat, he said any major project in the region would affect their habitat. The Bhadhra River in Western Ghat is home to a species of fresh water oyster. The Upper Bhadhra irrigation project, if materialised, may affect the survival of that particular species, he said.

Dr K. Prabhakar Acharya, former Principal of Bhuvanendra College, Karkal, said that many villages in the Western Ghats have sacred groves. These groves have their own ecological significance. Some varieties of fishes are found in the ponds and rivers adjoining temples in the region. Protection of such sacred groves and water bodies is essential for protecting the ecologically sensitive areas in Western Ghat region, he said.

Mr Vasudev Bloor, General Secretary of the National Fishworkers' Forum, said that the proposed river diversion project of the State Government, if implemented, will have an impact on the fish habitat in the coastal region. The river water flowing from western ghat is the source of nutrient elements for fishes in the sea. The river diversion will have impact in Western Ghats and coastal regions of the state, he said.

Mr B.K. Parameshwar Rao, farmer from Belthangady taluk, said that farmers in Western Ghats should focus on the local species of food crops. Seed banks should be set up at panchayat level to protect the local species of food crops, he said.

### Hydroelectric project

Dr Harish Bhat from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, said that the nearly 700 hectares of land would be submerged, if the Gundya hydroelectric project in the western ghat region materialises. This area is home to several species of plants and animals. The project would block two elephant corridors in the region, he added.

Ms Vidya Nayak, Member of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, said that the panel is conducting public consultations in four places in Karnataka. They are: Sirsi, Mangalore, Mysore and Sringeri.

Prof Keshav Korse, Member of the Western Ghats Task Force of Karnataka, presided over the meeting.

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