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# Western Ghats threatened by 'drinking water' project

Jayashree Nandi,TNN | Sep 12, 2013, 07:11 PM IST

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NEW DELHI: Western Ghats may be in danger again. This time from a "drinking water" supply project. Yettinahole diversion project located in the ecologically sensitive zone as per the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel involves 8 dams inside the forests, 250kms long canals, 80kms and 50kms long raising mains, a reservoir that will submerge 1200 hectares of land and 2 villages according to a recent assessment by environmentalists.

The project aims to supply drinking water to Chikbalapur and to provide

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urban supply and industries. Strangely, the project seemed to have escaped appraisal by the Expert Appraisal Committee of the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF), claiming that it is a drinking water scheme. As per the EIA Notification 2006, Drinking Water Supply Schemes are exempt from Appraisal and Environmental Clearance process.

Several activists mainly from Karnataka wrote to union environment minister, Jayanthi Natarajan requesting her intervention in the matter. Appiko movement leader, Panduranga Hegde, Tiger expert, Ullas Karanth, Praveen Bhargava from Wildlife First, Indian Institute of Science scientist, T V Ramchandra, noted rainwater harvesting expert Vishwanath Srikataiah, Niren Jain of Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation, Himanshu Thakkar of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People are among who have assessed the matter and written to Natarajan.

The letter highlights that EAC failed to look in to the finer details of how the project would impact the fragile ecology of the region and gave a clearance on the basis of the project proponent's report. However, as per the project proposal the command area for the 337 irrigation tanks comes to 29, 182 ha which means it's a category A project and surely comes under the purview of EIA. The Project Report claims that it can generate 125-150 MW of power through gravity canals which also needs environmental clearance.

### Here are the issues raised by the activists

The reservoir at Devaranyadurga will require 1200 hectares of land, including 50% forest land



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and will submerge at least 2 villages. Majority of the project falls in Ecologically Sensitive Zone I as per the WGEEP, where any large infrastructure project is banned. The project plans to divert 24.01 TMC water from 4 streams in Western Ghats. The project does not divulge forest land required. Only by estimating heads under 'cutting thick forests' in its estimates, it will require 107.27 hectares land with thick forest cover only for laying raising mains.

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