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# ECOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREAS OF WESTERN GHATS

## *Why in news?*

The Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) held a Video Conference to discuss issues relating to notification of Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) pertaining to Western Ghats.

## *Details of Declaring Western Ghats as ESA*

- To conserve and protect the bio diversity of Western Ghats while allowing for sustainable and inclusive development of the region, Government of India had constituted a High-Level Working Group under the Chairmanship of Dr. Kasturirangan.
- The Committee had recommended that identified geographical areas falling in the six States of Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu may be declared as Ecologically Sensitive Areas.
- A draft notification was issued in October 2018 mentioning the areas to be notified in the ESA.

## *States' Views*

- There is need to ensure protection of the western Ghats, however, the states expressed their views as regards activities and extent of area mentioned in the said notification.
- It was decided that state specific issues shall be further deliberated so as to arrive at a consensus on the issue.

## *What does Declaration of Western Ghats as ESA mean?*

- In the ESA, all kinds of mining activities, thermal power plants and highly polluting industries would no longer be allowed.



- The existing mines shall be phased out within five years from the issue of final notification or on the expiry of the existing mining lease, whichever is earlier.
- All new 'Red' category industries and the expansion of such existing industries shall be banned.
- Other kinds of projects and activities, like operation of hydropower plants, and 'orange' category of industries, will be strictly regulated in the ESA.
- New expansion projects of building and construction with built-up area of 20,000 square meters and above shall be prohibited too.

## Western Ghats



- The Western Ghats, also known as Sahyadri are a mountain range that covers an area of 140,000 square kilometres parallel to the western coast of the Indian peninsula.
- It traverses the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat.
- **It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of the eight “hottest hot-spots” of biological diversity in the world.**
- According to UNESCO, the Western Ghats are older than the Himalayas.



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## ***Prelims Fact Bits on Western Ghats***

1. Western Ghats are **continuous range of mountains** (Gaps exist, but not like the Eastern Ghats)
2. Major gaps in the range are the **Goa Gap**, between the Maharashtra and Karnataka sections, and the **Palghat Gap** on the Tamil Nadu and Kerala border between the Nilgiri Hills and the Anaimalai Hills.
3. The Western Ghats meet the Eastern Ghats at the Nilgiri mountains in north-western Tamil Nadu.
4. **Evergreen Forests** are found here.
5. **Anaimudi** is the highest peak.
6. Western Ghats are **older than Himalayas**.
7. **Nilgiri Biosphere** is the most famous Biosphere reserve in WG.
8. Local Names for western ghats are: Sahyadri in Maharashtra, **Nilgiri hills** in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, **Anaimalai hills and Cardamom hills** in Kerala.

## ***Importance of Western Ghats***

- A total of thirty-nine areas in the Western Ghats, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and reserve forests, were designated as world heritage sites in 2012 – twenty in Kerala, ten in Karnataka, five in Tamil Nadu and four in Maharashtra.
- They influence Indian monsoon weather patterns by intercepting the rain-laden monsoon winds that sweep in from the south-west during late summer.
- The dense forests also contribute to the precipitation of the area by acting as a substrate for condensation of moist rising orographic winds from the sea.
- The northern portion of the narrow coastal plain between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea is known as the Konkan, the central portion is called Kanara and the southern portion is called Malabar.
- The Western Ghats form one of the four watersheds of India, feeding the perennial rivers of India.
- The major river systems originating in the Western Ghats are the Godavari, Kaveri, Krishna, Thamiraparani and Tungabhadra rivers.