

Greens write to forest ministry to safeguard W Ghats' eco-sensitive areas

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Pune: Environmental experts in Kolhapur, Sindhudurg, and Pune on September 19 sent an appeal to the ministry of environment, forests, and climate change to set aside Maharashtra govt's plea for excluding over 1,981sqkm of land from the draft notification of Western Ghats eco-sensitive areas (ESAs).

Over 2,000 people from Sindhudurg and Kolhapur, including students, experts, NGOs and citizens, approached the ministry backing the demand proposed by renowned botanist Madhukar Bachulkar.

"Our humble request is that the central govt should not accept Maharashtra state's request and should not reduce the area of sensitive regions. Govt should accept ecologist Madhav Gadgil's report. Only then will the entire Western Ghats remain intact and secure," the letter said.

Bachulkar told TOI that since 2013, there have been several versions of the draft notification with no declaration in sight.

He added, "From 64% land coverage, ESAs in the Western Ghats have reduced to 37%. We demand that the central govt stop considering continuous objections from the states and declare the ESAs. Otherwise, mining and industrial activities will destroy the Ghats."

As per the sixth draft notification, 17,340 sqkm area in Western Ghats of Maharashtra has been proposed to be notified as eco-sensitive area with 184 villages in Kolhapur and 192 villages in Sindhudurg.

Experts told TOI that most of Raigad, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, and Kolhapur's Western Ghats belt suffers from excessive mining projects, disturbing elephant and tiger corridors in Dodamarg taluka.

At least 55 villages have been earmarked for industrial projects and 25 for industrial special zones along with 75 villages in Konkan for development projects.

"For many years now, the loss of biodiversity and degradation of the environment in the Konkan region has continued at a rapid speed. The situation here will become worrisome if development projects start," Bachulkar added.

Yogesh Koli, assistant professor at Sant Rawool Maharaj College Kudal in Sindhudurg, said they are seeking more objections from citizens till the September 27 deadline. "We are conducting awareness programmes, spreading the message to every college student and also communicating with all organisations in the state to oppose this exclusion," he added.

Head: Exclusion Of 388 Villages As ESAs

The state govt in August sought exclusion of 1,981sqkm of land

388 villages of the proposed 2,127 villages are not in the draft notification of Western Ghats eco-sensitive areas published on July 31

District I Villages

Raigad I 121

Ratnagiri I 98

Sindhudurg I 89

Kolhapur I 31

Pune I 20

Nashik I 15

Thane | 14

Satara | 11

Sangli | 2

One each in Palghar and Dhule

Fifth Notification To Expire

ESAs were demarcated 14 years ago based on recommendations by ecologist Madhav Gadgil committee in 2011

Three years later, the report was diluted by the K Kasturirangan committee

Only 37% of the 1,29,037 sqkm area of Western Ghats was to be declared as ESAs instead of the earlier 64% proposed by Gadgil

Five draft notifications followed for the declaration spanning Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu

There is a persistent push by the states to reduce the area proposed as ESAs

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