Notification on Western Ghats Eco Sensitive Zone

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Environment*

Why in News?

Recently, Environment Ministry reissued its draft on Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Area (ESA), 7th draft in decade - reflecting disputes with 6 States over village inclusion and balancing conservation with development.

Key Provisions

- **Activities Prohibited –** Mining, quarrying, sand mining, new thermal power plants, certain industries, large construction projects.
- **Activities Regulated –** Hydel power generation and other development projects.
- **Extent –** ESA proposed at 56,825.7 sq. km across 6 States: Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Gujarat.

  Karnataka has the largest ESA share as per the current draft.

State Concerns

- **Impact on Agriculture and Plantations –** Fear of restrictions affecting livelihoods.
- **Infrastructure and Development –** Apprehensions about curbs on roads, housing, and industry.
- **Village Inclusion –** Disputes over names/areas of villages to be

included; expert committee (2022) still examining objections.
- **Example –** 13 villages in Kerala's Wayanad district (Mananthavady, Sulthan Bathery, Vythiri taluks) continue to be listed despite earlier protests.

Historical Background

- **2011 Gadgil Committee –** Recommended entire 1,29,000 sq. km Western Ghats as ESA with graded protection.
- **2013 Kasturirangan Committee –** Suggested 37% of Western Ghats (59,940 sq. km) as ESA, focusing on natural landscapes.
- **Successive Drafts –** Since 2014, repeated attempts to balance conservation with State concerns.

Current Status

- **Latest Draft –** Open for ***public objections for 60 days***.
- **No Substantive Changes –** Area, State-wise extent, and regulatory provisions same as July 2024 draft.
- Centre yet to reconcile conservation objectives with States' development concerns.

Significance

- **Ecological –** Western Ghats is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, biodiversity hotspot, source of major rivers.
- **Policy –** ESA notification crucial for balancing conservation with sustainable development.
- **Governance –** Highlights challenges of federal-centre coordination in environmental regulation.

Reference

The Hindu | ESA

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering