

Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Area (ESA)

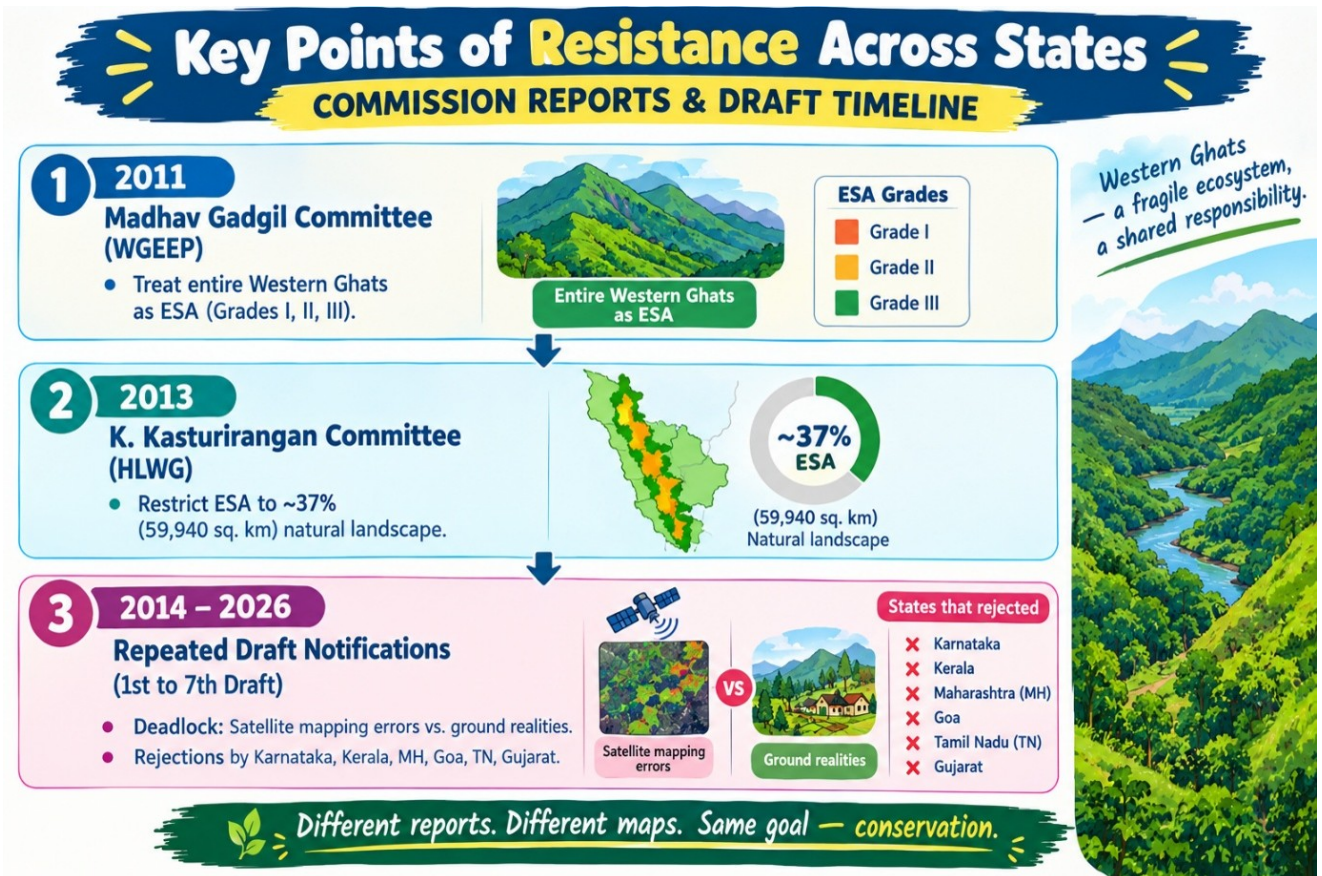
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Why in News?

Recently, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's (MoEFCC) seventh draft notification proposing to declare 56,825.7 sq. km across 6 states as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).

Key Highlights of the 7th Draft Notification

- **Geographical Scope** - Encompasses **4,402 villages across 56,825.7 sq. km** of the Western Ghats (covering ~37% of the mountain range):
 - **Karnataka:** 20,668 sq. km (largest proposed area across 10 districts).
 - **Maharashtra:** 17,340 sq. km.
 - **Kerala:** 9,993.7 sq. km.
 - **Tamil Nadu:** 6,914 sq. km.
 - **Goa:** 1,461 sq. km.
 - **Gujarat:** 449 sq. km (lowest proposed coverage).
- **Prohibited Activities** - Complete ban on new commercial mining/quarrying, sand mining, red-category polluting industries, new thermal power plants, and large construction/township projects.
- Existing mines must phase out within 5 years or upon lease expiry.
- **Regulated & Exempted Activities** - Hydroelectric power projects remain permissible subject to strict environmental clearances and lean-season environmental flows.
- Agriculture, plantation practices, housing repairs, and routine livelihoods are explicitly exempted.



- **Karnataka (Unanimous Legislative Rejection)**

- Opposes satellite-based remote sensing mapping, arguing it fails to distinguish natural forests from human settlements, coffee/cardamom plantations, and public infrastructure.
- Demanded a 1-year window to conduct a comprehensive ground-level physical survey.

- **Kerala (Exclusion Demands)**

- Requested reducing its proposed ESA footprint from 9,993.7 sq. km to 8,590.69 sq. km, insisting on excluding all human-inhabited areas, agricultural belts, and plantations.

- **Other States (Boundary Realignment)**

- **Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat** have raised objections regarding village-level boundary overlaps, fears of land depreciation, and restrictions on regional infrastructure development.

Significance

- The Western Ghats, one of the world's eight "hotspots" of biodiversity, acts as the water tower of Peninsular India and sequesters ~10% of India's forest carbon.
- A piecemeal, state-by-state political exclusion compromises landscape-level ecological continuity and wildlife corridors.
- Highlights the challenge of balancing environmental regulation with local economic fears (such as land value drop and commercial interests in quarrying/tourism).
- Citing the Kerala Model of ground-truthing, experts recommend combining high-resolution spatial mapping with local Gram Sabha consultations to achieve consensus before the 2027 committee deadline.

Reference

[Down to Earth | Western Ghats ESA](#)



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