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For UPSC Civil Services Examination Aspirants



RESEARCH-DRIVEN
CONTENT



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EXAM-READY
APPROACH

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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 29.07.2026

GS Paper III: Environment

1. Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Areas: Seventh Draft Notification

a. Introduction

The Centre has issued the seventh draft notification proposing 56,825.7 sq km of the Western Ghats across six States as an Eco-Sensitive Area (ESA). It replaces the sixth draft that lapsed amid continuing Centre-State disagreement over demarcation.

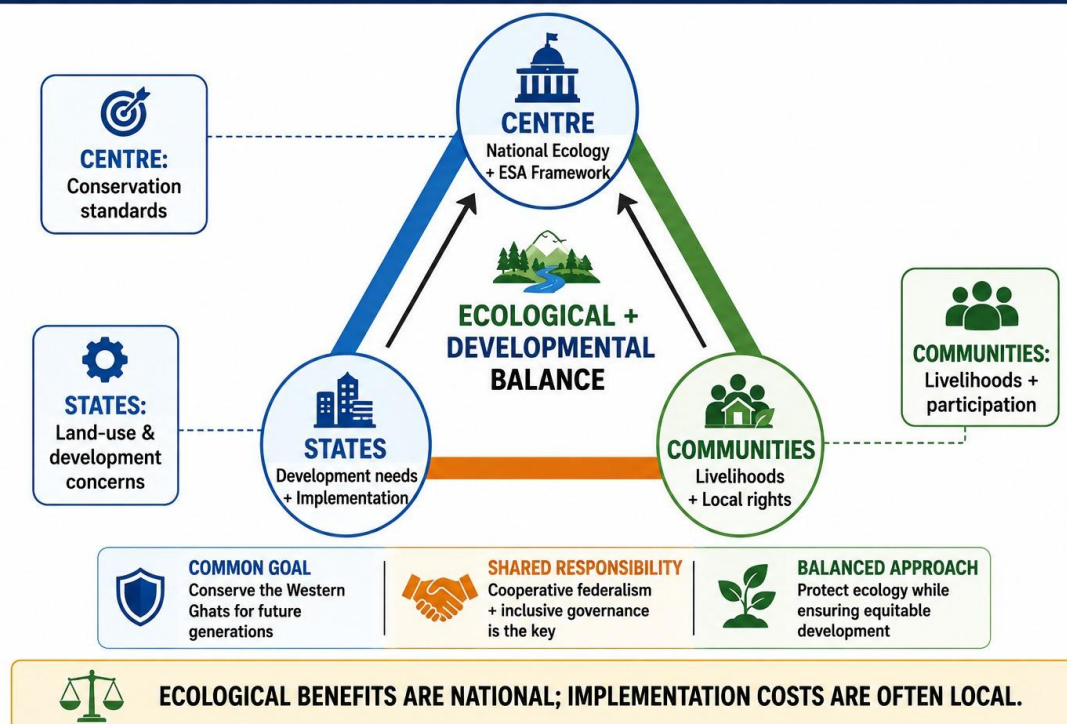
b. Key Provisions

The draft proposes ESAs across Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Activities proposed to be prohibited/restricted include:

- Complete ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining; existing mines to be phased out within five years of final notification or lease expiry, whichever is earlier.
- No new thermal power plants or expansion of existing plants.
- Ban on new or expanded 'Red Category' highly polluting industries.
- Restrictions on large construction projects of 20,000 sq m or above.
- New/expanded township projects covering 50 hectares or more prohibited.
- Final notification may be issued State-wise in phases or through a single combined notification, allowing flexibility where consensus has already emerged.

WESTERN GHATS CONSERVATION: THE THREE-WAY GOVERNANCE BALANCE



c. Analysis/ Observations

Significance

- **Ecological security:** Regulation of high-impact activities can reduce habitat fragmentation and degradation of one of India's most important biodiversity regions.
- **Disaster resilience:** Restricting quarrying, mining and large-scale construction assumes greater importance given the Ghats' vulnerability to landslides, erosion and extreme rainfall-related disasters.
- **Development within ecological limits:** Rather than prohibiting all economic activity, the draft primarily targets activities with a large ecological footprint.
- **Regulatory certainty:** Final notification can end the prolonged uncertainty created by successive drafts since 2014.

Why does the deadlock persist?

- **Centre-State differences:** Gujarat and Goa have largely converged with the Centre, while Karnataka continues to oppose the proposed demarcation; issues also remain with Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.
- **Livelihood and development concerns:** States fear implications for settlements, agriculture, infrastructure, mining and local economic opportunities.
- **Demarcation problem:** Ecological landscapes overlap with plantations, habitations and livelihood areas, making a uniform boundary difficult.
- **Conservation versus federal autonomy:** Ecological benefits transcend State boundaries, but States and local communities bear much of the immediate developmental cost.
- **Implementation legitimacy:** Environmental regulation imposed without adequate consultation can generate local resistance, weakening conservation itself.

Gadgil-Kasturirangan Debate: Core Policy Issue

Gadgil approach	Kasturirangan approach
Broader ecological protection	Relatively narrower ESA approach
Strong decentralised governance	Greater reliance on scientific/geospatial demarcation
Bottom-up conservation	Greater accommodation of development concerns

The larger lesson is that scientific identification of ecological fragility must be complemented by democratic legitimacy and local participation.

d. Way Forward

- Undertake ground-truthing and micro-level mapping to distinguish ecologically critical landscapes from settlements and livelihood areas.
- Use graded regulation based on ecological sensitivity, rather than a uniform restriction model.
- Strengthen participation of Gram Sabhas, local bodies and affected communities in demarcation and implementation.
- Use the provision for State-wise phased notification to prevent disagreement in some States from indefinitely delaying protection in States where consensus exists.
- Combine strict protection of high-impact zones with sustainable livelihood alternatives and transparent compensation mechanisms.

Conclusion:

The repeated Western Ghats notifications reveal that the challenge is no longer simply identifying ecologically fragile areas, but creating a federal and socially legitimate conservation framework. Effective protection must reconcile ecological security, developmental aspirations and community rights rather than treating them as competing absolutes.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

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