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Bannerghatta Park's Eco-Sensitive Zone Reduced

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The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) had issued a new draft notification for Bannerghatta National Park (BNP), nearly 2.5 years after the first draft notification had declared an ESZ of 268.96 sq.km. In the latest notification, the Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) was reduced to 169 sq.km.

- The **reduction in the ESZ**, which regulates and prohibits certain activities that may destroy the forest, may **open up more areas** in the vicinity **for mining and commercial development** around the rapidly-urbanising Bengaluru city.
- Areas, where ESZ has been cut down drastically, are either being mined or are prospective mining areas. The other sector that will benefit from the cutting down of ESZ is real estate as land has now been freed from environmental constraints along highways close to BNP.

Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)

- Eco-Sensitive Zones or Ecologically Fragile Areas are **areas notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, Government of India around Protected Areas, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- Activities conducted in eco-sensitive zones are regulated under the **Environment (Protection Act) of 1986** and no polluting industry or mine is allowed to come up in such areas.
- As a general principle width of the eco-sensitive zone could go up to 10 km around a protected area. In case of places with sensitive corridors, connectivity and ecologically important patches, crucial for landscape linkage, even area beyond 10 km width can also be included in the eco-sensitive zone.
- Industries classified as prohibited under guidelines for declaration of eco-sensitive zones around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are not allowed to operate in these zones.

- The guidelines prohibit activities such as commercial mining, commercial use of firewood and major hydropower projects.
- Activities such as felling of trees, commercial use of natural water resources, including groundwater harvesting and setting up of hotels and resorts, are regulated in these areas.
- The basic aim is to regulate certain activities around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries so as to minimise the negative impacts of such activities on the fragile ecosystem encompassing the protected areas.

Significance of ESZ

- During the course of industrialisation, urbanisation and other developmental initiatives, lot of changes occur in the landscape which may sometimes become the cause of natural disasters like earthquakes, flash floods, landslides, cloudburst etc.
- In order to preserve certain regions/areas bestowed with unique plants, animals, terrains Government has declared them as national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, etc.
- Further, **to minimise the impact of urbanisation** and other developmental activities, areas adjacent to such protected areas have been declared as Eco-Sensitive Zones.
- The **National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) 2017-2031** endeavours to protect areas outside the protected area network to prevent isolation/destruction of fragments of biodiversity.
- The purpose of declaring eco-sensitive zones around protected areas is for **creating some kind of ‘Shock Absorber’** to the protected area. They would also **act as a transition zone** from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
- Protection of eco-sensitive zones has assumed importance in view of the overzealous developmental initiatives in fragile ecosystems. A balanced, rational developmental approach is the need of the hour.

Bannerghatta National Park

- The Bannerghatta National Park is located near Bangalore in **Karnataka**.
- Wildlife such as elephants, gaur, leopard, jackal, fox, wild boar, sloth bear, Sambar, Chital, spotted deer, barking deer, common langur, bonnet macaque, porcupine and hares are found in abundance.
- The **Bannerghatta Biological Park** has been an integral part of Bannerghatta National Park and emerged out as an independent establishment during the year 2002.
- In order to meet the growing demand for eco-recreation, eco-tourism and conservation, some area of forest from the National park were set aside to constitute as Biological Park.

- Bannerghatta Biological Park is **one among the few places in the world where wilderness is preserved so close to a big city**. It is having different units such as **Zoo, Safari, Butterfly Park and Rescue Center (Conservation of captive animals)**.