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## Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve and Vaigai River: Tamil Nadu

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### Why in News

The recently declared **Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve** in **Tamil Nadu** will provide protection to **Megamalai**, the **Vaigai's primary catchment**, in turn helping water levels to rise in the river.



## Key Points

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- **About Vaigai River:**
  - **Origin and Tributaries:**
    - It **originates in the Western Ghats** (Varushanad Hills).
    - It travels through the **Pandya Nadu region** of Tamil Nadu.
    - Its **main tributaries** are Suruliyaru, Mullaiyaru, Varaganadhi, Manjalaru, Kottagudi, Kridhumaal and Upparu.
    - The Vaigai is **258 kms long** and finally **empties into the Palk Strait** near the **Pamban Bridge** in **Ramanathapuram district**.
  - **Heritage River:**
    - The Vaigai was the river that **flowed through the noted city of Madurai**, the **capital** (4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century CE) **of the ancient and prosperous Pandya kingdom** located in southern Tamil Nadu.
    - The river finds a mention in **Sangam literature** dated to **300 before the Common Era**.
  - **Significance:**
    - The river fulfils the **drinking water requirement of five districts of Tamil Nadu** namely Theni, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai and Dindigul.
    - It also provides **irrigation to 2,00,000 hectares** of agricultural land.
- **Rejuvenation of Vaigai:**
  - Its **deterioration happened at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century** when the British started **deforesting the Megamalai region** which acts as a major catchment for Vaigai. Consequently, the **water flow in the river reduced gradually**.  
Some **2,00,000 people died** in this region during the **Great Famine of 1876-77**.
  - Following the famine, the British Crown **proposed diverting water from the Periyar river (Kerala)** and feeding it to the Vaigai through a tunnel.  
The Vaigai presently **gets about 80% of its water from the Periyar dam**.  
The **balance 20%** is obtained from the **major watershed of the Megamalai region** during the northeast monsoon season.
  - The **Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve** will **protect wild animals and the natural forests, their habitats** which **act as watersheds**.

- **Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve:**
  - **Establishment:**
    - It was established **in February 2021**. It was jointly declared by the Centre and Tamil Nadu governments.
    - For this, the **Megamalai WLS** and the adjoining **Srivilliputhur WLS** were clubbed together.
    - Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve is the **fifth Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu**, and **51<sup>th</sup> tiger reserve of India**.
  - **Ecological Diversity:**
    - Animals seen here are **Bengal tiger, elephants, gaur**, Indian giant squirrel, **leopard, Nilgiri Tahrs**, etc.
    - It has a mix of tropical evergreen forests and semi-evergreen forests, dry deciduous forests and moist mixed deciduous forests, grassland.
- **Other four Tiger reserves of Tamil Nadu:**
  - **Anamalai tiger reserve**
  - **Kalakkad - Mundanthurai tiger reserve**
  - **Mudumalai tiger reserve**
  - **Sathyamangalam tiger reserve**

**Source: DTE**