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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

- **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** (4th-11th 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 18th 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 **51th 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