



## Ecosystems Under Threat

In the aftermath of **Kerala's devastating floods**, key **ecologically sensitive zones** must be protected through immediate remediation. The destruction in Kerala should serve as warning for other equally sensitive zones.

### India's Ecological Hotspots Under Threat

- **The Western Ghats: A Threatened Ecosystem:** Madhav Gadgil report described the Western Ghats as a biodiversity treasure trove and designated the entire region as an ecologically sensitive area, in varying degrees.
  - **Threats**
    - Pollution, mining and deforestation.
    - Original natural vegetation converted to cultivated lands, coffee and tea plantations.
    - Hydroelectric reservoirs.
  - **Measures for Conservation**
    - Some form of protection is needed by balancing the development in the region.
    - Gadgil committee report should be considered for the sustainable development of the Ghats as a whole.
- **Himalayas: Unstable and Ecologically Fragile:** It is one of the most unstable and fragile mountain regions in the world.
  - **Threats**
    - It is witnessing one of the highest rates of warming globally, impacting the lifecycle and habitat of several species.
    - Due to warming, Glaciers are shrinking.
    - Increase in the frequency of snow avalanches in the western Indian Himalayas poses a risk to the people of the region.
    - Overexploitation of natural resources, road buildings and hydroelectric dams.
  - **Measures for Conservation**
    - Anthropogenic activities like exploitation of natural resources, building of massive hydroelectric dams etc should be controlled.
- **Ganga: The Clean-up Challenge:** The Ganga basin covers 26% of the country. Ganga-Brahmaputra basins support the subsistence and commerce of more than 800 million people.
  - **Threats**
    - Water pollution and solid waste.
    - Dams, barrages and irrigations indiscriminately extract water from the river.
  - **Measures for Conservation**
    - Problem of water pollution and unsafe disposal of solid waste should be tackled in a mission mode.
    - Participation of all the stakeholders including the local community along the river basins.
- **The Sunderban: A Critically Endangered Ecosystem:** The world's largest coastal mangrove forest, the Sunderbans, stands as one of the most vulnerable regions to emergent threats posed by climate change.
  - **Threats**
    - It is low-lying and the land is also sinking at a faster rate.
    - Rise of sea level along the coast is highest along the eastern coast especially near

the Sunderbans.

- Increasing agriculture and industrial activity.
- Due to coastal erosion the maximum amount of land has lost to sea.
- Rise in siltation and salinity threatens the survival of indigenous flora and fauna.

- **Measures for Conservation**

- Increasing agriculture and industrial activities which have destroyed thousands of hectares of mangrove cover should be controlled.
- Participation of all the stakeholders including the local community along the river basins.

- **The Andamans: Vanguard for a Potential Tsunami:** This cluster of 572 islands in the Bay of Bengal is home to primitive, indigenous tribes like the Onge and the Jarawa. It is known for its mangrove forests and coral reefs.

- **Threats**

- NITI Aayog has come up with a development plan to promote eco-tourism projects in the Andaman and Nicobar raising concerns among ecologists.
- The developmental works like building of railway line from Port Blair to Diglipur though kept on hold for now, may affect the ecology of the island group.

- **Measures for Conservation**

- While developing tourism, the government should keep in mind the conservation of fragile ecology, unique biodiversity and culture of the islands.