



# **Intrusion into Environment by the State of Karnataka: A Critical Overview**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper critically explores the nature, methods, and impacts of the interference in the environment by the State of Karnataka. Using recent policy changes, administrative actions, court filings, and media investigations, the study analyses how legislative modifications, administrative denotifications, weakened environmental assessment procedures, and controversial governance decisions have influenced ecological health, biodiversity, water security, and social livelihoods across Karnataka. The analysis places current events within theoretical frameworks of environmental governance, political economy, and administrative law. The paper ends with recommendations to restore the precautionary principle, enhance institutional independence, and incorporate ecological carrying capacity into development planning.

**Keywords:** environmental governance, Karnataka, Environmental Impact Assessment, Western Ghats, conservation policy

## **Introduction**

In recent times, the state of Karnataka has been facing several urgent issues of the environment, many of which are caused by the state government's own policies and governance practices, rather than external or natural pressures. This article examines how government policies or inactions can be seen as intrusions into ecological systems, the ways such intrusions happen, and why they matter to the people and the region's future sustainability and biodiversity.

**Karnataka's Rich and Fragile Environment:** Karnataka is home to vital ecological assets like the Western Ghats, one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, extensive forest areas, numerous lakes and tank systems, and a complex network of rivers and wetlands. Located in the southwestern part of the state within the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Western Ghats, Karnataka hosts many sensitive ecosystems. Protecting these systems is therefore of national and international importance rather than just local concern.

However, rapid urbanization, infrastructure development, mining, and real estate pressures have led government policies to often conflict with environmental sustainability. In this context, "intrusion" occurs

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when decisions that alter, damage, or threaten ecosystems are made, typically to favour short-term political or economic gains instead of long-term ecological health.

These ecosystems support regional livelihoods, water security, and climate resilience. However, in recent years, the state's environmental governance has followed a pattern of policy decisions and administrative actions that environmentalists and scholars describe as intrusive measures that weaken protective buffers, allow denotification of forest lands, loosen regulatory oversight, and deprioritise scientific conservation recommendations. This paper explores the content and implications of these intrusions.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Environmental governance is viewed as a multi-level, multi-actor process that involves state institutions, civil society, businesses, and the courts in this study. (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). "Intrusion" is defined here as deliberate state actions that lead to measurable reductions in environmental protection or oversight, either through legal amendments or Administrative denotification, which is the actual reduction of the authority of regulatory bodies. The public trust doctrine, the precautionary principle, and ideas of participatory governance offer normative bases for judging the legality of state policies.

Karnataka's institutional framework and environmental landscape: Karnataka's varied ecology includes the Western Ghats, Dry Deciduous and Moist Deciduous woods, inland wetlands, and urban lakes ecosystems that supply groundwater, among other things. recharge, flood reduction, carbon sequestration, and habitat for native species. Institutional tools for preservation include state-level environment departments and legislative bodies like the Karnataka Forest Conservation Act (1980), Environment (Protection) Act (1986), the Karnataka State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (KSEIAA), and the State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB). Superimposed on these are legal actions by the High Courts and the Supreme Court, as well as recommendations from national-level expert committees (for example, the Kasturirangan Committee, Gadgil Committee for Western Ghats).

### **Major Areas of Government Intrusion**

Reducing Protective Buffers around Lakes and Tanks: The planned modification in buffer zones surrounding tanks and lakes is one of the most evident examples of intrusion. The Karnataka Tank plan was authorised by the state cabinet. The Conservation and Development Authority (Amendment) Bill 2025, which proposes lowering buffer zones from the consistent 30 meters for all lakes to as low as 3 meters, is one example. meters (depending on the size of the lake) to allow for building or other uses. (The Times of



India) The outcome is that encroachment is made easier, natural drainage and flood control are compromised, and the ecological functions of lakes, such as biodiversity support, microclimate management, and groundwater recharge, are diminished. The plan and the cabinet's backing of it have sparked discussion. Constant Lake activists and civil society are very critical of each other.

**De-notification or Relaxation of Forest/Protected Land Status:** The government's decision to formally de-reserve or de-notify land that was previously classified as forest or protected for alternative uses like construction and urban development is another worry. or the growth of industry. For instance, the state petitioned the Supreme Court of India for the denotification of approximately 602 acres of forest area. in the area between Peenya and Jalahalli. (The New Indian Express)

Such actions lead to greater fragmentation of ecosystems, a decrease in buffer zones for wildlife, and the destruction of protected habitat. Additionally, they may undermine the state's capacity to protect natural capital and biodiversity over the long run. Such government programs restrict the area of land that is legally protected and make one more susceptible to changes in how land is used.

**Environmental Clearance and Impact Assessment Process Under Strain:** The state's environmental institutional framework, which comprises companies meant to give unbiased oversight of projects, seems to be under pressure or weakened in reality. For example, the Karnataka State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (KSEIAA) is said to have continued approving projects even though the High Court had a formal stay. (Bangalore Mirror) When checks and balances become less efficient, big projects might go ahead without enough environmental risk analysis or full openness and public participation. This is regarded invasion as it reduces the effectiveness of protective governance systems.

New data suggested that the KSEIAA's impartiality may be questioned since it kept issuing licenses even when a court order officially stayed them. This also raised questions about the authority and credentials of the elected members. Legal supervision bodies are either unwilling or unable to enforce suspensions or order a thorough impact assessment, allowing projects to go on with less environmental study. evaluations. Raising the possibility of ecological harm.

**Resistance to Strong Conservation Measures in Fragile Zones:** The state government rejected the recommendations of the committee headed by K. R. Kasturirangan, which advised declaring extensive areas of the Western Ghats as giving local development priority and allowing mining of sand and stone in a sensitive environment (The Indian Express) This means that other interests come before apparent scientific



concerns about the fragility of the area, by policy inertia or resistance, therefore interfering with rather than just safeguarding the integrity of the ecosystem.

Institutional Failures, Illegal Grants, and Incursion: Official checks of hundreds of cases of illegal forest land grants and encroachments found in and near Bengaluru and other parts of the country reveal investigations and disclosures. Although the state classified large areas of land as forest as early as the late nineteenth century, later, these lands were divided up or taken over without any clear legal process. Recent media stories and official investigations have not talked about them. These kinds of conflicting land use create government issues about restitution and compensation, as well as the degradation of metropolitan green cover.

### **Environmental Repercussions and Socioeconomic Consequences**

The Decay of Habitat and Biodiversity: Karnataka's Western Ghats and other ecosystems have special plants and animals that can only live in places where the environment is healthy and connected. Fragmentation from denotation, mining, and infrastructure leads to genetic isolation, local extinctions, and the destruction of crucial environmental connections.

Water Security and Metropolitan Resilience: Directly endangering flood control ability and groundwater recharge zones are encroachments on wetlands and decreased lake buffers. Among the reasons for the severity are the decrease in recharge areas, the rise in surface sealing, and the loss of historic tank systems. Cities like Bengaluru's water shortages.

Rural sensitivity and means of subsistence, particularly at danger, are populations relying on marshes and woodlands. Less enforcement, paired with state-led conversions of public lands, diminishes access to non-timber forest products, grazing areas, and irrigation aid, thus increasing socio-economic vulnerability.

Legal and Institutional Elements: Responsibilities of National Policy Tools and the Judiciary. Court rulings have sometimes addressed state-level errors in environmental management. Administrative actions can be stopped and corrections ordered by the High Courts and the Supreme Court. The state is simultaneously obliged to run within the legal bounds set by national policy instruments such as the National Green Tribunal (NGT), processes for environmental clearance, and the Forest Conservation Act.

Honesty and Accountability: Administrative sequestration of decision-making, whereby important land-use and environmental decisions are taken without evidence or open debate, leads to responsibility deficits. To strengthen administrative sequestration of decision-making, it is important to increase accountability.



Through open meetings, impartial environmental evaluations, and Right to Information (RTI) availability, some transparency gaps can be resolved.

Policy and Governance Evaluation: From a political economy point of view, land and resource allocation. Karnataka's situation points to more general political-economic forces at work whereby political will, industry, and urban development's requirements sometimes conflict with the need for environmental preservation. The state gives short-term fiscal benefits and local concerns top priority over long-term environmental capital in favor of development initiatives by acting as a facilitator of land transformation.

Required Institutional Reforms: Reforms are required to stop the invasion trend, including fiscal incentives dependent on compliance, rigorous carrying capacity evaluations for environmentally fragile regions, and legislative independence for environmental agencies. Match the local government's revenue sources with environmental restoration and preservation.

### **Recommendations**

1. Bring back strong buffer rules and evidence-based zoning. Strengthen and standardise excellent buffer criteria for wetlands and lakes, utilising supporting hydrological and ecological assessments. An open scientific study is required for any departure. and group sessions.
2. Stop random denotification and make sure due process is followed. Until independent ecological evaluations and stakeholder meetings are completed, halt forest land denotification. To stop unauthorised conversion from the centre, utilise the legal protections given by the Forest Conservation Act.
3. Improve Institutional Capacity and Autonomy KSEIAA, KSPCB, and forest departments should have more independence, technical capacity, and transparency. Create conflict-of-interest policies, ensure fixed terms, and professionalize appointments.
4. Plan using carrying capacity and ecosystem services. Include ecosystem service valuation into regional and municipal planning, and need carrying-capacity studies for development proposals in sensitive locations to match financial incentives with ecological health.
5. Get more people involved and give them access to environmental information. Improve RTI compliance so that administrative and data justifications are readily available to the public, and that changes affecting protected areas require extensive public hearings.



6. Legal and Administrative System Solutions for Encroachment. Following ecological restoration principles and preventing punitive dispossession of underprivileged groups who might have occupied property as a result of past wrongdoings, use time-bound strategies to recover unlawfully given forest lands.

## Conclusion

Karnataka's environmental trajectory exhibits a pattern of government policies that encourage land conversion, weaken conservation regulations, and reduce institutional control forms of government intervention, all of which have significant environmental and social impacts. The state faces real development challenges, but its long-term prosperity depends on maintaining its environmental infrastructure and promoting strong, open governance. The above recommendations are aimed at preserving the public domain for future generations, restoring the balance between development and conservation, and restoring institutional integrity.

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