

Four Hundred Ecologists Write to Environment Minister against Amendments to Forest Conservation Act

A group of more than 400 ecologists – ranging from renowned academics and practitioners to students and researchers – have written to Union environment minister Bhupendra Yadav about the proposed amendments to the Forest Conservation Act, expressing their concerns.

“Given this already fragile state of India’s forests, and based on our diverse experiences from the ground, we have serious concerns regarding the Forest Conservation Amendment Bill, 2023, that has recently passed through the Joint Parliamentary Committee. In fact, one could argue that this is not just an Amendment but an entirely new Act.”

The ecologists have highlighted four major concerns with the Bill – and said that instead of amending the existing Act, it seems to seek to change it entirely. “We strongly believe that the present Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 along with the judgment in the Supreme Court order in WP 202/9 together provide a strong basis for the protection of natural ecosystems, and require better and effective implementation,” the signatories say.

- (1) Reclassification of forest areas
- (2) Exemptions for projects near border areas and for security purposes
- (3) Exemptions for zoos, safari parks and ecotourism activities
- (4) Riding roughshod on local human communities

As the devastating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation become clearer, highlighted in the recent floods across north India, this is the time for the government to reaffirm its commitment to protecting the country’s immense biodiversity. Doing so will require strengthening forest protection laws and the rights of indigenous peoples to own and manage their lands. This Amendment will only seek to hasten the decline of India’s natural forests.