

Madhav Gadgil, Biography, Western Ghats Report, Gadgil Committee

July 1, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Madhav Gadgil was a noted Indian **environmentalist** and **ecologist** known for his contributions to **biodiversity conservation** and **sustainable development**. He played an important role in shaping India's **environmental policies** and raising awareness about protecting natural resources. Gadgil strongly advocates for a balance between **development and environmental protection**. His work highlights the importance of preserving ecosystems while ensuring human well-being.

Madhav Gadgil (1942-2026)

- Madhav Gadgil was a leading Indian **ecologist** and **environmentalist**, widely respected for his lifelong work in **protecting nature** and promoting **sustainable development** in India.
- He came from an intellectual background, his father Dhananjay Gadgil was a noted **economist**, which influenced his academic and research-oriented approach.
- Over a career spanning more than **six decades**, Gadgil became known as a **“people’s scientist”**, focusing on protecting **marginalized communities** and promoting **community-based conservation** of forests, wetlands, and biodiversity.

- He was an important **institution builder**, having founded the **Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES)** at **Indian Institute of Science in 1982**, which became a major center for ecological research.
- His work also showed how **local knowledge and participation** can solve real problems, for example, villages working together to reduce pollution and restore biodiversity in rivers and forests.
- His work played a key role in the creation of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (1986)** and also contributed to important laws like the **Biological Diversity Act (2002)** and the **Forest Rights Act (2006)**.
- He gained national attention as the chairman of the **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)**, also known as the **Gadgil Committee**, where he recommended protecting the **Western Ghats** through graded ecological zones.
- Apart from research, he also made strong **literary contributions**, co-authoring books like *This Fissured Land* and *Ecology and Equity* with Ramachandra Guha, explaining the link between **environment and society**.
- For his contributions, he received several prestigious awards including the **Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award, Tyler Prize**, and the **UNEP Champions of the Earth Award**, recognizing his impact on **environmental conservation**.

Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) / Gadgil Committee

- The **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)**, also known as the **Gadgil Committee**, was set up in **2010 by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change** under the chairmanship of **Madhav Gadgil** to study and protect the **Western Ghats**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and major biodiversity hotspot.
- Its main aim was to **assess the ecological condition** of the region, identify **ecologically sensitive areas (ESAs)**, and suggest ways for **conservation along with sustainable development**.
- **Key Recommendations of WGEEP**
 - The panel declared the **entire Western Ghats (about 1.29 lakh sq km)** as an **Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)** due to its fragile ecosystem.
 - It divided the region into **three zones** based on sensitivity: **ESZ-1 (highly sensitive)**, **ESZ-2 (moderately sensitive)**, and **ESZ-3 (less sensitive)**, with different levels of restrictions.
 - It suggested **strict controls on development**, including:
 - No new **mining activities** and phasing out existing mines in highly sensitive zones.
 - Ban on **genetically modified crops**, new **hill stations**, and **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)**.
 - Restrictions on large infrastructure projects like **major roads, railways, and dams** in sensitive areas unless absolutely necessary.
 - The report also proposed creating a special body called the **Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA)** under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 to **manage and regulate activities** across the six states (Gujarat, Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu).
 - A key feature was its focus on **inclusive and decentralized governance**, recommending that **Gram Sabhas and local communities** should play a major role in decision-making.

Issues and Controversy related to Gadgil Committee

- The report faced **strong opposition**, especially from states like **Kerala and Maharashtra**, due to fears that strict rules would harm **agriculture, mining, and development projects**.
- Many critics argued that the recommendations were **too environment-focused** and could negatively impact livelihoods.
- Due to these concerns, the report was **not accepted by the central government**.

Kasturirangan Committee (Follow-up Panel)

- After the rejection of the Gadgil report, a new panel led by **K Kasturirangan** was formed in 2013 to review it.
- The **Kasturirangan committee** suggested a **smaller Ecologically Sensitive Area (about 56,825 sq km)** instead of covering the entire Western Ghats.
- It took a more **balanced approach**, allowing some development while still restricting **polluting industries, mining, and large projects**.
- Unlike Gadgil's approach, it identified **specific villages** to be included in ESAs rather than the whole region.

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/madhav-gadgil/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.