

Unite against new NCR regional plan to protect Aravallis: Eco-activists

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While all eyes are set on the next meeting of the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) to decide the fate of the NCR Draft Regional Plan 2041, activists across the NCR have united against the plan.

The plan proposes to rechristen Aravallis as 'natural zones' rather than 'natural conservation zone'. This move is feared to expose the sole lungs of Faridabad and Gurugram to exploitation and have long-term effects such as implications on air quality, groundwater recharge, and forest cover. The 2041 plan is set to replace the 2021 NCR Regional Plan and has been in force since 2005. Environmentalists claim that the revised plan is not just regressive but also threatens the Aravallis and other crucial natural ecosystems in the four North Indian states.

"The plan, if implemented, will destroy more than 70 per cent of the Aravallis and other crucial natural ecosystems in the NCR. Not just the Aravalis, this plan will wipe out rivulets and water-recharging zones. It cannot be implemented in its current spirit," says an official statement from the Aravalli Bachao Trust.

One of the key objections to the plan is the replacement of the 'natural conservation zone' with 'natural zone'. While the earlier plan protected the entire Aravalli range in Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan with no construction allowed in the area, the Draft Regional Plan 2041 has made it a "natural zone". This zone will be an area with features such as mountains, hills, rivers and water bodies. The plan, according to the environmentalists, will leave out a large portion of the Aravallis from the protected zone as it will give states the discretion to identify their own "natural zones" using revenue records and the ground situation.

"Given the fact that Haryana has always tried to scuttle Aravallis out of the no-construction zone, this will mean the end of the forest and at the moment, Gurugram or Faridabad can't afford that," said environmentalist Gaurav Sinha. The draft plan also says mountains, hills, rivers, water bodies, forests notified under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, wildlife sanctuaries notified under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and eco-sensitive zones, wetlands and conservation under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 will also be declared as "natural zones".

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