

Shola Grasslands

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Why in news?

- According to an expert committee report, expanding plantations of exotic species, including tea, in the Nilgiris can wipe out Shola vegetation.

About the Sholas:

- The Shola vegetation are **tropical montane forests** found in the Western Ghats separated by rolling grasslands in high altitudes.
- It is a **stunted forest growth of diverse grass species and** made up of dwarf trees growing 25-30 feet.
- **Vegetation is double layered storey with closed canopy** which hardly permits a single ray of sunlight to penetrate in the natural vegetation.
- Compared to 1973, Shola grasslands areas have seen a **7% decline by 2014**.
- According to the report, the change in vegetation will **result in loss of water sources** and is already **leading to massive landslides**.
- Invasive species like eucalyptus, tea plantations and wattle and naturalized **alien species like Lantana camara, Opuntia stricta, Parthenium hysterophorus and Senna spectabilis** have had a serious impact on the Shola forest and grasslands.

Importance of Sholas:

- They serve as **huge water harvesting and storage structures** and are rich store houses of biodiversity.
- Many of the **rivers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu originate** from the Shola grasslands and are perennial.
- With depletion of Sholas and other forests, the streams that supply water to them dry up in summer.

