



Forest and Tree Cover in India

For Prelims: Tree Cover, Forest Cover, National Mission for a Green India (GIM), National Action Plan on Climate Change, India State of Forest Report-2021, National Afforestation Programme, Environment Protection Act of 1986, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act.

For Mains: India State of Forest Report-2021, Issues Associated with Forests in India, Government Initiatives for Forest Conservation.

Why in News?

India is lagging behind in the targets to increase the **number and quality of tree- and forest-cover plantations** set in the [National Mission for a Green India \(GIM\)](#).

- States with significant shortfall in tree cover include Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Kerala.

How is Tree Cover Different from Forest Cover?

- Tree cover refers to the **total area of land that is covered by trees, regardless of whether or not the trees** are part of a forest ecosystem.
 - **Forest cover**, on the other hand, **refers specifically to the area of land that is covered by a forest ecosystem**, which is defined as an area with a **tree canopy density of more than 10%** and an **area of more than 1 hectares**.
- So, all forest cover is tree cover, but not all tree cover is forest cover.

What is the National Mission for a Green India?

- **GIM** is one of the eight Missions under the [National Action Plan on Climate Change](#).
 - It aims at **protecting, restoring and enhancing** India's forest cover and responding to climate change.
 - The target under the **Mission is 10 million hectares (Mha) on forest and non-forest lands** for increasing the forest/tree cover and to improve the quality of existing forest.
 - The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** supports the States/Union Territories for carrying out afforestation activities through this **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
 - Improving tree cover is critical to [sequester carbon](#) and **bolster India's carbon stocks** as part of its international commitments to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

What is the Status of Forests in India?

▪ About:

- As per the [India State of Forest Report-2021](#), forest and tree cover in the country increased by **2,261 square kilometres since the last assessment in 2019**.
- India's total forest and tree cover was **80.9 million hectares**, which accounted for **24.62% of the geographical area of the country**.
 - The report said **17 States and Union Territories had more than 33% of their area under forest cover**.
 - **Madhya Pradesh** had the largest forest cover, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.
 - The top five States in terms of forest cover as a percentage of their total geographical area were **Mizoram (84.53%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.33%), Meghalaya (76%), Manipur (74.34%) and Nagaland (73.90%)**.

▪ Issues Associated with Forests in India:

- **Shrinking Forest Cover:** According to the **National Forest Policy of India**, the ideal percentage of total geographical area under forest should be at least **33% to maintain ecological stability**.
 - However, it currently covers just **24.62%** of the country's land and is shrinking rapidly.
- **Resource Access Conflict:** There is often **conflict between the interests of local communities and those of commercial interests**, such as pharmaceutical industries or timber industries.
 - This can lead to **social tensions and even violence**, as different groups struggle to access and use the resources of the forests.
- **Climate Change:** Forest disturbances caused by climate change, **including insect outbreaks, invasive species due to climate led migration**, wildfires, and storms, reduce forest productivity and change species distribution.
 - By 2030, **45-64% of forests** in India will experience the effects of climate change and rising temperatures.

▪ Government Initiatives for Forest Conservation:

- [National Afforestation Programme](#)
- [Environment Protection Act of 1986](#)
- [Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers \(Recognition of Forest Rights\) Act, 2006](#)

How can India Enhance its Forest Cover?

- **Utilising Technology for Conservation:** Technology can be utilised such as [remote sensing](#), to monitor and track forest cover, forest fire and identify areas in need of protection.
 - Also, **Potential resource mapping** can be done in unexplored forest areas, and they can be brought under **scientific management and sustainable resource** extraction maintaining density and forest health
- **Dedicated Forest Corridors:** For **safe intrastate and interstate passage of wild animals and protecting their habitat from any external influence**, dedicated forest corridors can be maintained giving a message of peaceful-co existence.
- **Promoting Agroforestry:** This practice involves **integrating trees and forest-based products** into farming systems. This can help **increase forest cover and also provide farmers with additional income** and resources.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. At the national level, which ministry is the nodal agency to ensure effective implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006? (2021)

(a) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

- (b) Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- (c) Ministry of Rural Development
- (d) Ministry of Tribal Affairs

Ans: (d)

Q2. A particular State in India has the following characteristics: (2012)

1. It is located on the same latitude which passes through northern Rajasthan.
2. It has over 80% of its area under forest cover.
3. Over 12% of forest cover constitutes the Protected Area Network in this State.

Which one among the following States has all the above characteristics?

- (a) Arunachal Pradesh
- (b) Assam
- (c) Himachal Pradesh
- (d) Uttarakhand

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. "The most significant achievement of modern law in India is the constitutionalization of environmental problems by the Supreme Court." Discuss this statement with the help of relevant case laws. **(2022)**

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