19th Session of United Nations Forum on Forest

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Why in News?

Recently, India participated in the **19th Session** of the United Nations Forum on Forests **(UNFF)** at the UN Headquarters in New York.

- India highlighted its significant **advancements in forest conservation** and sustainable forest management, leading to a **consistent increase in forest cover** over the past fifteen years.

What were the Key Takeaways from UNFF19?

- **India presented its revised National Forest Policy** emphasising forest fire prevention and management through recommendations and technological solutions.
    - According to UNFF, about 100 million hectares of forest or **3% of world's total forest area are affected by fires each year.**
    - India proposes operationalising the **Global Fire Management Hub,** a collaborative effort by the **UNEP** and the **FAO** to share knowledge and experiences in mitigating forest fires.
- India suggests establishing **universally accepted standards like Model Forests Act** for forest certification programs for consistent and responsible forest management practices worldwide.
- The forum **reviewed** the **UN's strategic plan for forests (2017-2030)** and progress made in achieving global forest goals like **enhancing forests' economic, social, and environmental benefits** and securing finances.
- A UN report highlighted **concerns about "Climatisation" of forests, driven by** market-oriented approaches **for carbon sequestration,** reducing forests ecological and social values roles to mere carbon sinks.
- **Indonesia** presented its **Forest and Other Land Use Net Sink 2030 strategy,** and **Malaysia** committed to keeping **at least 50%** of its **territory under tree cover.**

What were India's Highlighted Initiatives in Forest Management at UNFF19?

- India highlighted its success in using technology to manage forest fires.
    - Examples include **real-time fire monitoring** via remote sensing, online fire reporting through **web portals**, and utilising ecological methods for restoration.
        - Based on the forest inventory records**, 54.40% of forests** in India are exposed to **occasional fires, 7.49% to moderately frequent fires** and **2.40% to high incidence levels.**

- Globally, **India ranks third** in the **net gain of average annual forest area** between 2010 and 2020.
- India completed its **50 years of** Project Tiger and **30 years of** Project Elephant, demonstrating its commitment to species conservation and habitat protection.
- India introduced the **'Green Credit Program'** to incentivise tree plantation and restoration of degraded forest lands to strengthen climate action initiatives.
- In 2023, India hosted the **country-led Initiative under UNFF** at Dehradun, attended by representatives from 40 countries and 20 international organisations, focusing on forest fire management and forest certification.

What is the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)?

- **About:**
  - The UNFF is **an intergovernmental policy forum** that promotes **"management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.**
  - UNFF was **established in 2000** by the **UN Economic and Social Council**.
  - The Forum **has universal membership.**
- **Major Global Forest Related Events:**
  - **1992:** UN Conference on Environment and Development adopts the **"Forest Principles"** and **Agenda 21.**
  - **1995**: **Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (1995)** was established to implement the **Forest Principles** from 1995 to 2000.
  - **2000: UNFF** is established as a **functional commission** of the UN Economic and Social Council.
  - **2006**: UNFF agrees on **four Global Objectives on Forests.**
    - Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management (SFM);
    - Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits;
    - Increase significantly the area of sustainably managed forests;
    - Reverse the decline in official development assistance for the SFM
    - Mobilise increased financial resources for implementation of SFM.
  - **2007:** UNFF adopts the **UN Non-Legally Binding Instrument** on All Types of Forests **(Forest Instrument).**
  - **2011: The International Year of Forests, "Forests for People".**

What are the Key Facts About the Indian Forest Policy?

- **The National Forest Policy, 1894 (Colonial Focus):**
  - The policy **prioritised timber production** and custodial management.
  - **Forest classification was introduced**, with emphasis on protecting commercially valuable areas.
- **The National Forest Policy, 1952 (National Needs):**
  - Policy **focused on national priorities** like land-use management and environmental protection.
  - Emphasised securing resources like timber, pasture, and fuelwood for national development.
- **The National Forest Policy, 1988 (Ecological Security):**
  - Prioritised **environmental stability, biodiversity conservation**, and soil and water security.
  - Advocated for large-scale afforestation and social forestry programs.
- **Draft National Forest Policy, 2018 (Contemporary Challenges):**
  - Proposed **revisions to address modern issues like climate change** and human-wildlife conflict.
  - Focuses on mitigating climate change and promoting public-private partnerships for forest restoration.

Forest in India:

- As per latest **India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021,** the **total forest cover** of the country is 7,13,789 square kilometre which is **21.72% of the geographical area** of the country.

Conclusion

India's participation at UNFF19 showcased its success in forest conservation and sustainable management. India proposed a comprehensive national forest policy with technological solutions and called for international collaboration through a knowledge-sharing platform. While the High-Level Declaration remains under discussion, UNFF19 emphasised crucial steps towards achieving global forest goals.

> ***Drishti Mains Question:***
>
> Q. Discuss key Indian initiatives regarding forest management. Also, suggest ways for implementing the comprehensive forest management system in India.

Ans-(d)

Q3. 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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