



Concerns Over Aravali Safari Park

Prelims: Aravali Mountain Range, Fold Mountain, Aquifers, Groundwater, Big Cats, WPA 1972.

Mains: Concerns Over Aravali Safari Park.

Why in News?

Recently, some Environmental Activists have raised concerns over the 10,000-acre **Aravali safari park Project** proposed in Haryana.

What are the Key Points of Safari Park?

- This project will be **the largest such project in the world**. Currently the largest curated safari park outside Africa is in Sharjah, **which opened in February 2022**, with an area of about two thousand acres.
- It aims to **boost tourism and employment opportunities** for the local people.

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WHAT THE PARK MAY HAVE

Entertainment zone | It would be designed along specific themes inspired from fiction or Indian mythological characters

The Safari Club | The recreation club would have leisure activities. It would also have venues to host conferences, large gatherings and even accommodation. An aquarium, zip flyer, cable car, canopy safari and tunnel walk will also be there

Eco village | It will take visitors through a cultural and culinary journey. It will have space for handicraft and handloom products and even fine dining. There may be open-air theatre, stalls, display galleries, kiosks and food outlets

Infrastructure | Road networks along with space for pedestrians. There would be elephant or horse rides as well as eco-trekking trails



What are the Concerns?

- The Aravalli safari project is being conceived and designed as a zoo safari and **not a natural jungle safari to see native Aravalli wildlife** in their natural habitat.
- Conservation of the **Aravallis does not even get a mention in the aims of the project**

mentioned in the Proposition.

- Vehicular traffic and construction in the area, **the proposed safari park will also disturb the aquifers under the Aravalli hills** that are critical reserves for the water-starved districts.
 - These aquifers are **interconnected** and any disturbance or alterations in the pattern can **significantly alter the groundwater table.**
- The group has especially objected to the **'underwater zone' envisioned in the park since the site is a "water-scarce region"**.
 - In Nuh district, the groundwater table is already below 1,000 feet at many places; the tube wells, borewells and ponds are running dry; Gurugram district has many areas in the 'red zone'.
- The location falls under the category of **'forest', according to many orders by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal**, and is protected under the **Forest Conservation Act 1972**. As such, cutting of trees, clearing of land, construction and real **estate development is prohibited on this land.**
- The group also highlighted that the construction proposed by the Haryana tourism department in May 2022 would be illegal and further damage the already damaged Aravalli ecosystem.

How are Wildlife and Forests Protected in India?

- **The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972:**
 - It provides for stringent punishment for violation of its provisions. The Act also provides for **forfeiture of any equipment, vehicle or weapon that is used for committing wildlife offence(s).**
 - Protected Areas, viz National Parks, Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves have been created in the country covering important habitats to provide better protection to wildlife, including threatened species and their habitat.
- **Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB):**
 - WCCB coordinates with State/UTs and other enforcement agencies to **gather intelligence about poaching and unlawful trade** in wild animals and animal articles.
 - Alerts and advisories were issued by **WCCB on poaching and illegal trade of wildlife** to the concerned State and Central agencies for preventive action.
- **National Green Tribunal:**
 - It is a specialized judicial body equipped with expertise solely for the purpose of **adjudicating environmental cases in the country.**
- **The Indian Forest Act, 1927:**
 - It seeks to consolidate the **law relating to forests, the transit of forest produces and the duty that can be levied on timber** and other forest produce.
- **The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006:**
 - The Act provides for creating the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Tiger and Other Endangered Species Crime Control Bureau.
- **The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:**
 - It provides a higher level of protection to the **forests and to regulate diversion of forest lands for non-forestry purposes. FC Act, 1980** - Prior approval of the Central Government is essential for DE-reservation of forest lands and / or diversion of forest lands for non-forestry purposes.
- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:**
 - It has been enacted to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation of forest land in forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, who have been residing in such forests for generations.

What are the Key Points of Aravali Mountain Range?

- **About:**
 - The Aravallis of Northwestern India, one of the **oldest fold mountains of the world**, now form residual mountains **with an elevation of 300m. to 900m.** They stretch for a distance of 800 km. from Himmatnagar in **Gujarat to Delhi, spanning Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi, the 692 kilometre (km).**
 - The mountains are divided into **two main ranges** - the **Sambhar Sirohi Range and the**

Sambhar Khetri Range in Rajasthan, where their extension is about 560 km.

- The hidden limb of the Aravallis that extends from Delhi to Haridwar creates a divide between the drainage of rivers of the Ganga and the Indus
- These are **fold mountains of which rocks are formed primarily of folded crust**, when two convergent plates move towards each other by the process called orogenic movement.
- The Aravallis date back to millions of years when a pre-Indian sub-continent collided with the mainland Eurasian Plate. Carbon dating has shown that copper and other metals mined in the **ranges date back to at least 5th century BC**.



▪ **Significance:**

- The Aravallis act as a **barrier between the fertile plains in the east and the sandy desert** in the west. Historically, it is said that the **Aravalli range checked the spread of the Thar desert towards the Indo-Gangetic plains**, serving as a catchment of rivers and plains.
- The Aravalli is rich in **biodiversity and provides habitat to 300 native plant species, 120 bird species** and many exclusive animals like the jackal and mongoose.
- Aravallis have an impact upon the **climate of northwest India and beyond**. During monsoons, it provides a **barrier and monsoon clouds move eastwards towards Shimla and Nainital**, thus helping nurture the **sub-Himalayan rivers and feeding the north Indian plains**. In the winter months, it protects the fertile alluvial river valleys from the cold westerly winds from Central Asia.
- For Haryana, having the lowest forest cover at around 3.59% of the total forest cover in India, the **Aravalli range is the only saving grace, providing the major portion of its forest cover**.
- Aravallis also function as a **groundwater recharge zone for the regions around that absorb rainwater** and revive the groundwater level.
- This range is considered the “lungs” for the world’s most polluted air of Delhi-**National Capital Region (NCR)**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year’s Question (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. As per recent amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927, forest dwellers have the right to fell the bamboos grown on forest areas.
2. As per the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, bamboo is a minor forest produce.
3. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 allows ownership of minor forest produce to forest dwellers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- The Indian Forest (Amendment) Bill 2017 permits felling and transit of bamboo grown in non-forest areas. However, bamboo grown on forest lands would continue to be classified as a tree and would be guided by the existing legal restrictions. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, recognises bamboo as a Minor Forest Produce and vests the “right of ownership, access to collect, use and dispose of minor forest produce” with Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers. **Hence, statements 2 and 3 are correct.**
- **Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Mains

Q. What are the consequences of Illegal mining? Discuss the Ministry of Environment and Forests’ concept of GO AND NO GO zones for coal mining sector. **(2013)**

Q. Examine the status of forest resources of India and its resultant impact on climate change. **(2020)**

Source: DTE

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