



International Day of Forests

For Prelims: International Day of Forests, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Sundarbans, Major and minor forest produce.

For Mains: Significance of Forests for India, Issues Associated with Forests in India.

Why in News?

The [International Day of Forests](#), also known as **World Forests Day**, is celebrated each year on **March 21** to raise awareness about the **importance of forests and trees for the survival of humanity and the planet**.

- The theme for 2023 is **'Forests and Health.'**

What is the History of International Day of Forests?

- The history of the **International Day of Forests** can be traced back to 1971 when the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#) established **World Forestry Day**.
 - The day was established to create and raise awareness of the importance of forests for people and the planet.
- In 2011, the [United Nations](#) declared the years **2011 to 2020 as the International Decade of Forests**.
 - Its objective was to promote sustainable management, conservation, and development of all types of forests.
- In 2012, the **International Day of Forests** was established.

What is the Status of Forests in India?

- 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%)**.

What is the Significance of Forests for India?

- **Ecosystem Services: One-third of the land on Earth is covered by forests**, which play a vital role in maintaining the **hydrological cycle, regulating climate, and preserving**

[biodiversity](#).

- For example, forests in the [Western Ghats](#) help to regulate the **water cycle of southern states** and protect against soil erosion.
- **Hub of Biodiversity:** India is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are found only in the country's forests.
 - For example, the [Sundarbans mangrove forests in the Bay of Bengal](#) are home to the [Royal Bengal tiger](#).
- **Poverty Alleviation:** Forests are also important for [poverty alleviation](#). Forests provide more than **86 million green jobs**. Everyone on the planet has had some form of contact with forests.
- **Home of Tribal Community:** They are also the **homes of the tribal community**. They are **ecologically and economically** a part and parcel of the forest environment.
 - For example, [Gond tribes of Madhya Pradesh](#).
- **Raw Material for Industries:** Forests provide **raw materials for a number of industries**, viz. silk worm rearing, toy making, leaf plate making, plywood, paper and pulp etc.
 - They also provide [major and minor forest produce](#):
 - Major such as **timber, round wood, pulp-wood, charcoal and fire-wood**
 - Minor produce like **bamboo, spices, edible fruits and vegetables**.

What are the Issues Associated with Forests in India?

- **Biodiversity Loss:** Deforestation and other activities that damage forests also lead to a **loss of biodiversity**, as plant and animal species are unable to survive in their natural habitat.
 - This can have **knock-on effects on the ecosystem as a whole**, as well as on the cultural practices of the communities that depend on these species.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

Way Forward

- **Comprehensive Forest Management:** Forest conservation should include all components of protection and sustainable management of forests such as, **forest fire control measures, timely survey, tribal-dedicated policies, reducing man-animal conflicts** and sustainable wildlife health measures.
- **Dedicated Forest Corridor:** **Dedicated Forest corridors** can be maintained for safe **intrastate and interstate passage of wild animals** and protecting their habitat from any external influence, giving a message of peaceful-co existence.
- **Resource Mapping and Forest Optimisation:** **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.
- **Viewing Tribals as Forest Entrepreneurs:** There is a need to **revitalise Forest Development Corporations (FDSC)** to structure commercialization of forests and **engage tribal communities as "Forest Entrepreneurs"** In exploration, extraction, and enhancement of forest-based products.

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)**

Source: TOI

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