



## Eco-Sensitive Zones

**For Prelims:** Eco-sensitive Zones, Environmental Protection Act 1986, Wildlife Protection Act 1972, National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016), Urbanization, One-horned Rhino, Kaziranga National Park, Forest Rights Act, Gram Sabha, Eco-tourism, Horticulture, Carbon footprints.

**For Mains:** Activities Around ESZs, Significance of ESZs, Challenges Associated with ESZs.

### Why in News?

Recently, [Eco-sensitive Zones](#) have been met with resistance from protests claiming that compliance with the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#) and the [Wildlife Protection Act 1972](#) has led authorities to disregard the **rights of forest communities and negatively affect their way of life** and livelihood.

### What is Eco Sensitive Zones?

#### ▪ About:

- The [National Wildlife Action Plan \(2002-2016\)](#) of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** stipulated that state governments should declare land falling **within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries** as eco-fragile zones or **Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs)** under the **Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- While the **10-km rule is implemented as a general principle**, the extent of its application can vary. **Areas beyond 10 km can also be notified by the Union government as ESZs**, if they hold larger ecologically important **“sensitive corridors”**.

#### ▪ Activities Around ESZs:

- **Prohibited Activities:** Commercial mining, saw mills, industries causing pollution (air, water, soil, noise etc), establishment of major [hydroelectric projects \(HEP\)](#), commercial use of wood.
- **Regulated Activities:** Felling of trees, **establishment of hotels and resorts, commercial use of natural water**, erection of electrical cables, drastic change of agriculture system, e.g., adoption of heavy technology, pesticides etc, widening of roads.
- **Permitted Activities:** Ongoing agricultural or horticultural practices, **rainwater harvesting, organic farming, use of renewable energy sources**, adoption of green technology for all activities.

#### ▪ Significance of ESZs:

- **Minimise the Impact of Development Activities:**
  - To **minimise the impact of [urbanisation](#)** and other developmental activities, the areas adjacent to protected areas have been declared as Eco-Sensitive Zones.
- **In-situ Conservation:**
  - ESZs help in **in-situ conservation, which deals with conservation of an endangered species** in its natural habitat, for example the conservation of the [One-horned Rhino](#) of [Kaziranga National Park](#), Assam.
- **Minimise Forest Depletion and Man-Animal Conflict:**
  - Eco-Sensitive Zones **minimise forest depletion** and man-animal conflict.

- The protected areas are based on the core and buffer model of management, through which local area communities are also protected and benefitted.
- **Minimise the Negative Impact on the Fragile Ecosystems:**
  - The purpose of declaring eco-sensitive zones around protected areas is to create some kind of a '**Shock Absorber**' for the protected area.
  - They also act as a **transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.**
- **Challenges Associated with ESZs:**
  - **Climate change:**
    - **Climate change** has generated land, water and ecological stress on the ESZs.
      - For example, **frequent forest fires or the Assam floods** which badly affected the **Kaziranga National Park** and its wildlife.
  - **Encroachment of Forest Rights:**
    - Sometimes, execution of The **Environmental Protection Act 1986** and the **Wildlife Protection Act 1972** makes the authorities ignore **forest communities' rights and impact their life and livelihood.**
      - It also includes dilution of rights provided to **gram sabha** for developmental clearances.
      - **Recognition of forest rights and gram sabha's consent were preconditions for considering proposals under The Forest Rights Act 2006** to divert forest land for non-forestry purposes - until the **MoEFCC** did away with them in **2022.**

## Way Forward

- **Community Engagement:** It is important to **involve local communities in the decision-making process** for the management of ESZs.
  - This can be done through the formation of **community-based organisations, such as user groups or conservation committees**, that are responsible for managing and protecting the resources found in these areas.
  - **Gram sabha** must be empowered with a **decision-making authority** in case of **developmental projects.**
- **Alternate Livelihood support:** It is important to provide **alternative livelihood options for local communities** who depend on the resources found in ESZs for their livelihoods.
  - This can include training programs and financial support for alternative livelihoods such as **eco-tourism, horticulture, and sustainable agriculture.**
- **Promoting Eco Restoration:** **Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, reducing climate change impacts by promoting carbon footprints** and through education, is needed.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

**Q. In which one among the following categories of protected areas in India are local people not allowed to collect and use the biomass? (2012)**

- (a) Biosphere Reserves
- (b) National Parks
- (c) Wetlands declared under Ramsar Convention
- (d) Wildlife Sanctuaries

**Ans: (b)**

**Source: TH**

