



Time to View Forest as a Heritage

This editorial is based on [“We need a forest-led COP27”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 13/10/2022. It talks about the state of Forest Conservation in India and forest optimisation along with technology optimisation.

For Prelims: State of India Forest Report 2021, Forest Conservation Act 1980, National Afforestation Programme, Environment Protection Act of 1986, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, Wildfires, Bramble Cay melomys.

For Mains: Significance of Forests, Challenges Related to Forest Management in India, Nature-based solutions.

India is not only famous for its **diverse architectural marvels and culture**, but also for its dense and vast **forest heritage**. According to the [State of India Forest Report 2021](#), the total forest cover of the country is **21.71% of the geographical area**.

But the rising demand for forest-based products and resultant **climate change, deforestation and encroachment** has caused severe loss to this valuable asset. According to **NITI Aayog**, around **13 million hectares of forests** are being lost every year.

Therefore, it is the need of the hour to understand that **forest sustainability is not an option but imperative**.

What is the Significance of Forests?

- **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**.
- 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.
- They are also the **homes of India’s submerged humanity—the tribals**. They are ecologically and economically a **part and parcel of the forest environment**.
- 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 Constitutional Provisions Regarding Forest?

- **Forests** are included in the **Concurrent List in the (Seventh Schedule)** of the **Constitution of India**.

- Through the [42nd Amendment Act, 1976](#) forests and protection of Wild Animals and Birds were transferred from State to Concurrent List.
- **Article 51 A (g)** of the Constitution states that it shall be the [fundamental duty](#) of every citizen to **protect and improve the natural environment** including forests and Wildlife.
- **Article 48 A** in the [Directive Principles of State Policy](#), mandates that the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to **safeguard the forests and wildlife** of the country

What are the Government Initiatives for Forest Conservation?

- [Forest Conservation Act, 1980](#)
- **National Afforestation Programme**
- [Environment Protection Act of 1986](#)
- [Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers \(Recognition of Forest Rights\) Act, 2006](#)

What are the Challenges Related to Forest Management in India?

- **Inadequate Forest Cover:** According to **National Forest Policy of India**, the ideal percentage of total geographical area under forest **should be at least 33%** to maintain ecological stability.
 - But currently it covers only **21.71% of the country's geographical area** and is dwindling day by day.
- **Unregulated Grazing:** India possesses a [livestock](#) population of over **412 million of which 270 million are bovine animals**, about **one-tenth of which graze in the forests**.
 - Due to **lack of strict grazing regulatory framework**, overgrazing in many parts of India is observed **causing serious damage to forests**.
- **Menace of Climate Change:** Climate change alters the **frequency and intensity of forest disturbances** such as **insect outbreaks, invasive species, wildfires, and storms**. These disturbances **reduce forest productivity and change the distribution of tree species**.
 - By **2030, 45-64% of forests in India will experience the effects of climate change** and rising temperatures.
 - **Many forest species in Himalayan region are already migrating to higher altitudes** and some species are **even facing extinction**.
 - The [Bramble Cay melomys](#) is the **first mammal reported to have gone extinct** as a direct result of climate change.
- **Low Productivity:** The **gap between consumption and production of timber and wood-based products in India** is rapidly increasing. Against the global average productivity of **2.1 m³/hectare/ year**, the productivity of **Indian Forest** is only **0.7 m³/hectare/ year**.
 - **Loopholes in regulation of Forest Development Corporations** is a major factor of low productivity as well as there is a considerable section of **north eastern forest in India which remain unexplored and can be potential medicinal hubs**.
- **Injustice with Tribes:** The **tribal communities, the hallmark of Indian civilization, are based on forest areas for their survival**. Although they live in isolation in forest areas, they are having harmonious relationships with forests and species.
 - But the **continuous deforestation, development of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and eco-parks** are negatively impacting their habitat and displace their living **leaving them with mental health issues**.
 - In 2014, around **450 families from indigenous Baiga and Gond communities** were evicted to protect tigers in the [Kanha Tiger Reserve](#).
 - In 2017, in Assam, **more than 1,000 people from Bodo, Rabha and Mishing tribal communities** were **forcefully evicted** from the [Orang National Park](#).

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **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 (FDCS)** to **structure commercialization of forests and engage tribal communities** as “**Forest Entrepreneurs**” In exploration, extraction, and enhancement of forest-based products.
- **Forest Waste to Forest Wealth: Technology** can be utilised for **reduction and recycling of waste**. Large quantities of inferior wood that is dumped in forests as a waste can be put to better use through seasoning and preservation treatment.
 - Also, **standards and codes can be promoted for wood products**.
- **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.
- **Towards Nature Based Solutions: Nature-based solutions** such as **blue-green infrastructure**, (green roofs, rain gardens, or constructed wetlands) can minimise the **impacts of climate change by capturing CO₂** from the air and sequestering it in plants, soils, and sediments.
 - It can also allow forests to regrow and restore wetlands.
 - Also, the **Dasgupta Review-Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity** reports that green infrastructure is **2-5 times cheaper** than grey infrastructure (**seawalls and water treatment plants**).

Drishti Mains Question

Forest sustainability is not an option but imperative. Explain.

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 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)

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