



Forest Fires

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Why in News

Recently, the **National Green Tribunal** has directed the Kerala Forest Department to submit its report in one month, on the steps taken to **prevent forest fires** and **implement the National Action Plan on Forest Fire** in the State.

Key Points

- **Forest Fires:**
 - Fire can play a vital role in keeping the forests healthy, recycling nutrients, helping tree species regenerate, removing invasive weeds and pathogens, and maintaining habitat for some wildlife.
 - As populations and demands on forest resources have grown, **the cycle of fire has spun out of balance.**
 - Forest fires have become an **issue of global concern.** In many countries, wildfires are burning larger areas, and fire seasons are growing longer due to global warming.
 - Globally, **forest fires release billions of tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere,** while hundreds of thousands of people are believed to die due to illnesses caused by exposure to smoke from forest fires and other landscape fires.

- **Reasons for Forest Fires:**

- **Thunderstorms** are the most likely natural cause for forest fires.
- The dry deciduous forests in central and southern India **face 5 to 6 months of dry period** and are vulnerable to fires.

The reasons are mainly **manmade**, particularly in cases where people visit forests and leave burning bidis, cigarette stubs or other inflammable materials.

- A major reason for forest fires in north-east India is **slash-and-burn cultivation**, commonly called jhum cultivation.

The north-east has tropical evergreen forests which are not likely to catch fire easily on their own like the dry deciduous forests of central and southern India.

- **India's Initiative to Tackle Forest Fire:**

- **National Action Plan on Forest Fires (NAPFF):**

- It was launched in 2018 to minimise forest fires by informing, enabling and empowering forest fringe communities and incentivising them to work with the State Forest Departments.
- The plan also intends to substantially reduce the vulnerability of forests across diverse forest ecosystems in the country against fire hazards.
- It also aims to enhance capabilities of forest personnel and institutions in fighting fires and swift recovery subsequent to fire incidents.

- **Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme:**

- The Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM) is the only centrally funded program specifically dedicated to assist the states in dealing with forest fires.
- The **FPM replaced the Intensification of Forest Management Scheme (IFMS)** in 2017.
- Funds allocated under the FPM are according to a center-state cost-sharing formula, with a 90:10 ratio of central to state funding in the Northeast and Western Himalayan regions and a 60:40 ratio for all other states.
- It also provides the states to have the flexibility to direct a portion of the **National Afforestation Programme (NAP)** and **Mission for Green India (GIM)** funding toward forest fire work.

- India has set ambitious policy goals for improving the sustainability of its forests.

- As part of the **National Mission for Green India** under India's **National Action Plan on Climate Change**, the government has committed to increase forest and tree cover.
- Under its **Nationally Determined Contribution**, India has committed to bringing 33% of its geographical area under forest cover and to create additional sinks of 2.5 billion to 3 billion tons worth of CO₂ stored in its forests by 2030.

Source: TH