



Eco-Sensitive Zones

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Why in News?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) had issued a new draft notification for reducing the Eco-Sensitive Zone of Bannerghatta National Park (BNP), Bengaluru in Karnataka.
- The reduction in the ESZ, may open up more areas in the vicinity for mining and commercial development around the rapidly-urbanising Bengaluru city.

What are Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs)?

- Eco-Sensitive Zones or Ecologically Fragile Areas are areas within 10 kms around Protected Areas, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- ESZs are notified by MoEFCC, Government of India under Environment Protection Act 1986.
- In case of places with sensitive corridors, connectivity and ecologically important patches, crucial for landscape linkage, even area beyond 10 km width can also be included in the eco-sensitive zone.
- The basic aim is to regulate certain activities around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries so as to minimise the negative impacts of such activities on the fragile ecosystem encompassing the protected areas.

Activities Allowed in 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, Tourism activities like hot-air balloons over the National Park, discharge of effluents or any solid waste or production of hazardous substances.

- **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

- To **minimise the impact of urbanisation** and other developmental activities, areas adjacent to protected areas have been declared as Eco-Sensitive Zones.
- The purpose of declaring eco-sensitive zones around protected areas is for creating 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Challenges and Threats to Eco-Sensitive Zones

- **Developmental activities:**
 - Activities such as construction of dams, roads, urban and rural infrastructures in the ESZ, create interference, negatively impact upon the environment and imbalance the ecological system.
 - For example, construction of road would lead to cutting down of trees which would further impact upon, soil erosion thereby destroying the habitats of the species preserved under the ESZ.
- **Governance and new laws:**
 - By failing to recognize the rights of forest communities and curbing poaching of animal, legislations like Environmental Protection Act 1986, and Wildlife Protection Act 1972, undermine the ESZs in favour of developmental activities.
 - For example - the new draft notification for reducing the ESZs of Bannerghatta National Park.

- **Tourism:**
 - As the pressure of tourism is rising, the government is developing new sites and gateways to the ESZ.
 - To cater to the increasing demand for eco-tourism, land around parks and sanctuaries is being cleared through deforestation, displacement of local people etc.
 - The tourists leave behind garbage such as plastic bags and bottles etc. which lead to environmental degradation.
- **Introduction of exotic species:** Exotic species like Eucalyptus and Acacia auriculiformis etc., and their plantations create a competing demand on naturally occurring forests.
- **Climate change:**
 - Biodiversity and climate change are interconnected, for example, the rise in global temperature has generated land, water and ecological stress on the ESZs.
 - For example, forest fires or the Assam floods which badly affected the Kaziranga National Park and its wildlife.
- **Local communities:** Slash and burn techniques used in agriculture, pressure of increasing population and the rising demand for firewood and forest produce, etc. exerts pressure on the protected areas.

Way Forward

- Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, reducing climate change impacts by promoting carbon footprints and through education, is needed.
- Conservation techniques, awareness about overexploitation of resources and its adverse impacts should be propagated among masses.
- Government, civil societies and stakeholders are largely required to collaborate with each other for balancing sustainable development with development.