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Review of National Forest Policy, 1988

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Why in News

Recently the Director General of Forests has advocated for the amendment of National Forest Policy, 1988.

The recommendations are based on a research paper published in 2016 in the *Natural Resources Forum*, a **United Nations Sustainable Development Journal** which called for sustainable forest management based on certification and a policy characterised by restoration, conservation and production equally.

Key Points

- **Data unavailability:** There is a lack of reliable data relating to growing stock, consumption and production of timber, which constrained forecast of supply and demand projections.

- **Focus on TOFs:**
 - The potential of timber production from Trees Outside Forests (TOFs) i.e. grown outside government Recorded Forest Areas (RFAs) must be explored and tapped.
 - **Recorded Forest Area (RFA)** refers to all the geographic areas recorded as **forest** in government records. **Recorded forest** areas comprises **Reserved Forests (RF)** and Protected Forests (PF), which have been constituted under the provisions of **Indian Forest Act, 1927**.
 - According to **India State of Forest Report (2011)**, timber production from government forests is 3.17 million m³ and **potential timber production from TOFs** is 42.77 million m³. **India State of Forest Report (ISFR)** is a biennial publication of **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**, an organization under the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change.
 - The Supreme Court ruling in the **Godavarman Case, 1996** stopping felling of trees in forest areas led to decrease in domestic production of timber.
 - Production forestry should focus on sustainable increase in forest productivity from TOFs and RFAs.
 - To boost production through RFA States must devise working plans and demarcate **10% of the forests for plantations**.
 - For TOFs, a synchronised nationwide policy could be developed.
 - Increasing wood production will also **push carbon sequestration, and help in mitigating effects of climate change**.
 - Increasing timber production from TOFs can **revive the rural economy**.
- **Review of Import-Export Policy:** Since the domestic timber production has declined and imports have increased manifolds, there is a need to review **Export-Import Policy**.
 - The domestic demand of timber has grown owing to increasing population and per capita GDP. Dependency on imports is not viable as **exporters worldwide are shifting to a conservation-based approach**.
 - **The Export Import Policy should be reviewed to rectify** the pricing in the market so that it is economically viable to grow trees on farmlands,
 - **Export Import Policy** or better known as Exim **Policy** is a set of guidelines and instructions related to the import and **export** of goods. The Government of **India** notifies the **Exim Policy** for a period of five years under the **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation Act), 1992**.
- **Revision of Indian Forest Policy:** The paper emphasized on revising the Indian Forest Policy **to boost domestic production**.
 - The conservation policies must focus on **maintaining ecological balance and improving biodiversity** through protected area management.
 - The restoration policies must target **reclamation, rehabilitation and regeneration** of degraded landscapes and wastelands.

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- India's forests are currently governed by the **National Forest Policy, 1988**
 - It has environmental balance and livelihood at its centre.
 - **Salient Features and Goals:**
 - Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and restoration of ecological balance.
 - Conservation of Natural Heritage (existing).
 - Checking Soil Erosion and Denudation in catchment areas of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs.
 - Checking extension of sand dunes in desert areas of Rajasthan and along coastal tracts.
 - Substantially increasing Forest/Tree Cover through Afforestation and Social Forestry.
 - Taking steps to meet requirements of fuel, wood, fodder, minor forest produces, soil and timber of Rural and Tribal Population.
 - Increasing the productivity of Forests to meet National Needs.
 - Encouraging efficient utilization of Forest Produce and Optimum Use of Wood (Timber).
 - Generation of Work Opportunities, the involvement of Women.
 - **Criticism:** It has not been updated in a long time while the situation of forests and climate has substantially changed.

Key policies regarding forests and forest management are either missing, delayed or left open-ended. For example, at present, there is no clear definition of forest that is accepted nationally and states are left to determine their definition of forests.
 - **A draft National Forest Policy** was released in 2019. The basic thrust of the draft is **conservation, protection and management of forests along with safeguarding the interest of tribals and forest-dependent people.**

Forestry in India

- According to **India State of Forest Report, 2019**, tree and forest cover together made up **24.56% (8,07,276 sq km)** of India's area/
- In landmark **1996 Godavarman Case**, the Supreme Court **defined forests** as all areas that are forests in the dictionary meaning of the term irrespective of the nature of ownership and classification thereof.

The court also ordered all non-forest activity like sawmills and mining to be suspended in forest areas and stopped felling of trees in this order.

- **Constitutional Provisions:**

- Forests and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds 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 along with Education, Weights & Measures and Administration of Justice.
- **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 endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

Source: TH