



Mains Marathon

Day 44: What is the recent supreme court judgement about Eco sensitive zone (ESZ)? Discuss the role of Eco sensitive zones in conserving biodiversity. (250 Words)

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Approach / Explanation / Answer

Approach

- Introduction by defining Eco Sensitive Zones and explain the recent judgement related to Eco Sensitive Zone.
- Explain the role of Eco Sensitive zone in conserving Biodiversity.
- Conclude suitably.

Answer

Peripheries of the protected area network are often vital ecological corridors links and must be protected to prevent isolation of fragments of biodiversity which will not survive in the long run. Therefore, all identified areas around Protected Areas and wildlife corridors are to be declared as ecologically fragile under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

As per the National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016), issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, land within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries is to be notified as eco-fragile zones or Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ).

The recent Supreme Court Judgements:

- In its judgment, the supreme court, while referring to the 2011 guidelines, directed all states to have a mandatory 1-km ESZ from the demarcated boundaries of every protected forest land, national park and wildlife sanctuary.
- It also stated that no new permanent structure or mining will be permitted within the ESZ.
- If the existing ESZ goes beyond a 1-km buffer zone or if any statutory instrument prescribes a higher limit, then such extended boundary shall prevail.

The role of Eco Sensitive Zone in conserving Biodiversity:

- **Act as a shock absorber:** ESZs around national parks, forests and sanctuaries act as a shock absorber” for the protected areas. These zones would act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to those involving lesser protection.

- **Prohibited activities:** Commercial mining, saw mills, industries causing pollution, 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. Thus, these restrictions help in conservation.
- **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.
- **Minimize the impact of development activities:** To minimize the impact of urbanization 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.
- **Minimize Forest Depletion and Man-Animal Conflict:** Eco-Sensitive Zones minimize 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.

The States should act as a trustee for the benefit of the general public in relation to natural resources so that sustainable development can be achieved in the long term. The government should not confine its role to that of a facilitator of economic activities for the immediate upliftment of the fortunes of the State. Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, promoting carbon footprints can be done.

Propagating Conservation techniques and creating awareness about overexploitation of resources and its adverse impacts among masses.

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