



# India's Forest Cover & Wasteland

## Why in News

Recently, the Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) informed [Rajya Sabha](#) about the **forest area in the country**.

- The data provided was as per the [India State of Forest Report, 2019](#) that is the **16<sup>th</sup> biennial assessment of India's forests** by **Forest Survey of India**, Dehradun an organisation under the MoEFCC.
- Information about the **Wasteland** in the country was also provided as per the [Wasteland Atlas, 2019](#).

## Key Points

### ▪ Definition of Forest:

- The word **'forest'** is not defined in any Central Forest Act, namely the [Indian Forest Act \(1927\)](#), or the **Forest Conservation Act (1980)**.
  - The Central government has **not laid down any criterion to define forest**.
  - The Indian Forest Act, 1927 **gives states the rights to notify Reserved Forests in their areas**.
- States are responsible for determining their definition of forests; this prerogative stems from a **Supreme Court** order called the **T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad vs the Union of India 1996** judgment.
  - In the judgement, the [Supreme Court](#) interpreted that the word "forest" must be understood according to its **"dictionary meaning"**.
  - This description **covers all statutorily recognised forests, whether designated as reserved, protected or otherwise**.

### ▪ Total Forest Area:

- The recorded forest area in the country is **7,67,419 sq km**, however the ministry has so far **not quantified the forest area that has been under dispute**.

### ▪ Category-Wise Forest:

#### ◦ Reserved Forests category:

- It is under **direct supervision of the Government**.
- **No public entry** allowed for the commercial purpose of cattle grazing.
- Total area under this category is **4,34,853 sq km**.

#### ◦ Protected Forests category:

- It is **looked after by the government**.
- **Local people are allowed** to collect forest produce and cattle grazing without causing any serious damage.
- Total area under this category is **2,18,924 sq km**.

- **Unprotected Forest Category:**

- They are unclassified Forests.
- No restriction on cutting trees or grazing cattle.
- Total area under this category is **1,13,642 sq km**.

- **Wasteland:**

- As per the **Wasteland Atlas, 2019**, published by the Ministry of Rural Development, the **total wasteland in the country is 5,57,665.51 sq km**.
- Wasteland is defined not as desertified land, but **land that is not used for agriculture, commercial use or as forest land**.

- For instance, it could use grasslands that are used by communities for grazing.

- **Governments Initiatives:**

- **National Mission for a Green India:**

- It is one of the eight Missions under the [National Action Plan on Climate Change \(NAPCC\)](#).
- It was launched in February, 2014 with the objective **to safeguard the biological resources of our nation and associated livelihoods against the peril of adverse climate change** and to recognise the vital impact of forestry on ecological sustainability, biodiversity conservation and food-, water- and livelihood-security

- [National Afforestation Programme \(NAP\)](#):

- It has been implemented since 2000 for the afforestation of degraded forest lands.
- It is being implemented by the MoEFCC.

- [Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority, \(CAMPA Funds\)](#):

- Launched in 2016, **90% of the fund is to be given to the states while 10% is to be retained by the Centre**.
- The **funds can be used for** treatment of catchment areas, assisted natural generation, forest management, wildlife protection and management, relocation of villages from protected areas, managing human-wildlife conflicts, training and awareness generation, supply of wood saving devices and allied activities.

- **National Action Programme to Combat Desertification:**

- It was **prepared in 2001 to address issues of increasing desertification** and to take appropriate actions.
- It is implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

## Constitutional Provisions for Forests

- Forests are included in the [Concurrent List](#) in the (Seventh Schedule) of the Constitution of India.
- Through the [42<sup>nd</sup> 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 endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

## Legislations

- India's forests are currently governed by the [National Forest Policy, 1988](#) which has environmental balance and livelihood at its centre.
- The [Scheduled Tribes And Other Traditional Forest Dwellers \(Recognition Of Forest Rights\) Act, 2006](#) recognizes the rights of the forest dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities were dependent for a variety of needs, including livelihood, habitation and other socio-cultural needs.

**Source: IE**

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/india-s-forest-cover-wasteland>