



Eco-Sensitive Zones

For Prelims: Eco-sensitive Zones, Environmental Protection Act 1986, Wildlife Protection Act 1972, National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016), Urbanization, One-horned Rhino, Kaziranga National Park, Forest Rights Act, Gram Sabha, Eco-tourism, Horticulture, Carbon footprints.

For Mains: Activities Around ESZs, Significance of ESZs, Challenges Associated with ESZs.

Why in News?

Recently, [Eco-sensitive Zones](#) have been met with resistance from protests claiming that compliance with the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#) and the [Wildlife Protection Act 1972](#) has led authorities to disregard the **rights of forest communities and negatively affect their way of life** and livelihood.

What is Eco Sensitive Zones?

▪ About:

- The [National Wildlife Action Plan \(2002-2016\)](#) of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** stipulated that state governments should declare land falling **within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries** as eco-fragile zones or **Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs)** under the **Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- While the **10-km rule is implemented as a general principle**, the extent of its application can vary. **Areas beyond 10 km can also be notified by the Union government as ESZs**, if they hold larger ecologically important **“sensitive corridors”**.

▪ Activities Around 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.
- **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:

- **Minimise the Impact of Development Activities:**
 - To **minimise the impact of [urbanisation](#)** 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.
- **Minimise Forest Depletion and Man-Animal Conflict:**
 - 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.
- **Minimise the Negative Impact on the Fragile Ecosystems:**
 - The purpose of declaring eco-sensitive zones around protected areas is to create 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.**
- **Challenges Associated with ESZs:**
 - **Climate change:**
 - **Climate change** has generated land, water and ecological stress on the ESZs.
 - For example, **frequent forest fires or the Assam floods** which badly affected the **Kaziranga National Park** and its wildlife.
 - **Encroachment of Forest Rights:**
 - Sometimes, execution of The **Environmental Protection Act 1986** and the **Wildlife Protection Act 1972** makes the authorities ignore **forest communities' rights and impact their life and livelihood.**
 - It also includes dilution of rights provided to **gram sabha** for developmental clearances.
 - **Recognition of forest rights and gram sabha's consent were preconditions for considering proposals under The Forest Rights Act 2006** to divert forest land for non-forestry purposes - until the **MoEFCC** did away with them in **2022.**

Way Forward

- **Community Engagement:** It is important to **involve local communities in the decision-making process** for the management of ESZs.
 - This can be done through the formation of **community-based organisations, such as user groups or conservation committees**, that are responsible for managing and protecting the resources found in these areas.
 - **Gram sabha** must be empowered with a **decision-making authority** in case of **developmental projects.**
- **Alternate Livelihood support:** It is important to provide **alternative livelihood options for local communities** who depend on the resources found in ESZs for their livelihoods.
 - This can include training programs and financial support for alternative livelihoods such as **eco-tourism, horticulture, and sustainable agriculture.**
- **Promoting Eco Restoration:** **Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, reducing climate change impacts by promoting carbon footprints** and through education, is needed.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Q. In which one among the following categories of protected areas in India are local people not allowed to collect and use the biomass? (2012)

- (a) Biosphere Reserves
- (b) National Parks
- (c) Wetlands declared under Ramsar Convention
- (d) Wildlife Sanctuaries

Ans: (b)

Source: TH

