



## International Day of Forests

**For Prelims:** International Day of Forests, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Sundarbans, Major and minor forest produce.

**For Mains:** Significance of Forests for India, Issues Associated with Forests in India.

### Why in News?

The [International Day of Forests](#), also known as **World Forests Day**, is celebrated each year on **March 21** to raise awareness about the **importance of forests and trees for the survival of humanity and the planet**.

- The theme for 2023 is **'Forests and Health.'**

### What is the History of International Day of Forests?

- The history of the **International Day of Forests** can be traced back to 1971 when the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#) established **World Forestry Day**.
  - The day was established to create and raise awareness of the importance of forests for people and the planet.
- In 2011, the [United Nations](#) declared the years **2011 to 2020 as the International Decade of Forests**.
  - Its objective was to promote sustainable management, conservation, and development of all types of forests.
- In 2012, the **International Day of Forests** was established.

### What is the Status of Forests in India?

- As per the [India State of Forest Report-2021](#), forest and tree cover in the country increased by **2,261 square kilometres since the last assessment in 2019**.
- India's total forest and tree cover was **80.9 million hectares**, which accounted for **24.62% of the geographical area of the country**.
  - The report said **17 States and Union Territories had more than 33% of their area under forest cover**.
  - **Madhya Pradesh** had the largest forest cover, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.
  - The top five States in terms of forest cover as a percentage of their total geographical area were **Mizoram (84.53%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.33%), Meghalaya (76%), Manipur (74.34%) and Nagaland (73.90%)**.

### What is the Significance of Forests for India?

- **Ecosystem Services: One-third of the land on Earth is covered by forests**, which play a vital role in maintaining the **hydrological cycle, regulating climate, and preserving**

[biodiversity](#).

- For example, forests in the [Western Ghats](#) help to regulate the **water cycle of southern states** and protect against soil erosion.
- **Hub of Biodiversity:** India is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are found only in the country's forests.
  - For example, the [Sundarbans mangrove forests in the Bay of Bengal](#) are home to the [Royal Bengal tiger](#).
- **Poverty Alleviation:** Forests are also important for [poverty alleviation](#). Forests provide more than **86 million green jobs**. Everyone on the planet has had some form of contact with forests.
- **Home of Tribal Community:** They are also the **homes of the tribal community**. They are **ecologically and economically** a part and parcel of the forest environment.
  - For example, [Gond tribes of Madhya Pradesh](#).
- **Raw Material for Industries:** Forests provide **raw materials for a number of industries**, viz. silk worm rearing, toy making, leaf plate making, plywood, paper and pulp etc.
  - They also provide [major and minor forest produce](#):
    - Major such as **timber, round wood, pulp-wood, charcoal and fire-wood**
    - Minor produce like **bamboo, spices, edible fruits and vegetables**.

## What are the Issues Associated with Forests in India?

- **Biodiversity Loss:** Deforestation and other activities that damage forests also lead to a **loss of biodiversity**, as plant and animal species are unable to survive in their natural habitat.
  - This can have **knock-on effects on the ecosystem as a whole**, as well as on the cultural practices of the communities that depend on these species.
- **Shrinking Forest Cover:** According to the National Forest Policy of India, the ideal percentage of total geographical area under forest should be at least 33% to maintain ecological stability. However, **it currently covers just 24.62% of the country's land** and is shrinking rapidly.
- **Climate Change:** Forest disturbances caused by [climate change](#), including **insect outbreaks, invasive species due to climate led migration, wildfires**, and storms, reduce forest productivity and change species distribution.
  - By 2030, **45-64% of forests in India will experience the effects of climate change** and rising temperatures.
- **Resource Access Conflict:** There is often conflict between the interests of local communities and those of commercial interests, such as [pharmaceutical industries or timber industries](#).
  - This can lead to **social tensions and even violence**, as different groups struggle to access and use the resources of the forests.

## Way Forward

- **Comprehensive Forest Management:** Forest conservation should include all components of protection and sustainable management of forests such as, **forest fire control measures, timely survey, tribal-dedicated policies, reducing man-animal conflicts** and sustainable wildlife health measures.
- **Dedicated Forest Corridor:** **Dedicated Forest corridors** can be maintained for safe **intrastate and interstate passage of wild animals** and protecting their habitat from any external influence, giving a message of peaceful-co existence.
- **Resource Mapping and Forest Optimisation:** **Potential resource mapping** can be done in **unexplored forest areas**, and they can be brought under scientific management and sustainable resource extraction maintaining density and forest health.
- **Viewing Tribals as Forest Entrepreneurs:** There is a need to **revitalise Forest Development Corporations (FDSC)** to structure commercialization of forests and **engage tribal communities as "Forest Entrepreneurs"** In exploration, extraction, and enhancement of forest-based products.

**UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

**Prelims**

**Q1. At the national level, which ministry is the nodal agency to ensure effective implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006? (2021)**

- (a) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- (b) Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- (c) Ministry of Rural Development
- (d) Ministry of Tribal Affairs

**Ans-(d)**

**Q2. A particular State in India has the following characteristics: (2012)**

1. It is located on the same latitude which passes through northern Rajasthan.
2. It has over 80% of its area under forest cover.
3. Over 12% of forest cover constitutes the Protected Area Network in this State.

**Which one among the following States has all the above characteristics?**

- (a) Arunachal Pradesh
- (b) Assam
- (c) Himachal Pradesh
- (d) Uttarakhand

**Ans: (a)**

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### **Mains**

**Q.** "The most significant achievement of modern law in India is the constitutionalization of environmental problems by the Supreme Court." Discuss this statement with the help of relevant case laws. **(2022)**

**Source: TOI**

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