



Conserving Protected Areas in India

For Prelims: [National Board for Wildlife \(NBWL\)](#), [Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary](#), [National Parks](#), [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#), [National Wildlife Board \(NWLB\)](#), [National Tiger Conservation Authority \(NTCA\)](#), [Community Reserves](#), [Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change \(MoEFCC\)](#), [National Board for Wildlife \(NBWL\)](#), [Forest \(Conservation\) Act, 1980](#), [WWF India](#), [Kaziranga National Park](#), [Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary](#), [Bandhavgarh National Park](#), [The National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#).

For Mains: Significance of Conservation of Protected Areas and Wildlife Habitat.

Source: HT

Why in News?

The [National Board for Wildlife \(NBWL\)](#) delayed a proposal from a company's subsidiary for oil exploration in the [Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary](#) in Assam, which is home to the endangered [hoolock gibbons](#).

- The sanctuary's importance as the habitat for **India's only ape species**, coupled with growing concerns over encroachment and development, has sparked debates on balancing development and conservation.

What are Protected Areas and Related Regulations in India?

- **About:**
 - [Protected areas \(PAs\)](#) are designated regions aimed at conserving biodiversity and protecting wildlife from human interference.
- **Classification and Regulation:**
 - **National Parks:** [National Parks](#) are the most protected areas in India, offering the highest level of legal protection.
 - These areas are declared under the [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act \(WPA\) 1972](#), and no human activities, except for scientific **research and controlled tourism**, are allowed within their boundaries.
 - Developmental activities such as mining, logging, and grazing are strictly prohibited.
 - The **State Government** is responsible for managing National Parks, but the [National Wildlife Board \(NWLB\)](#) and [National Tiger Conservation Authority \(NTCA\)](#) may also be involved, especially for specific species like tigers.
 - **Wildlife Sanctuaries:** Wildlife Sanctuaries also fall under the **WPA, 1972** but offer somewhat more flexibility than **National Parks**.
 - They allow certain human activities, such as grazing and the collection of forest products, provided they do not adversely affect wildlife.
 - Management of Sanctuaries falls under the jurisdiction of **State Forest Departments** with support from wildlife organisations and experts.

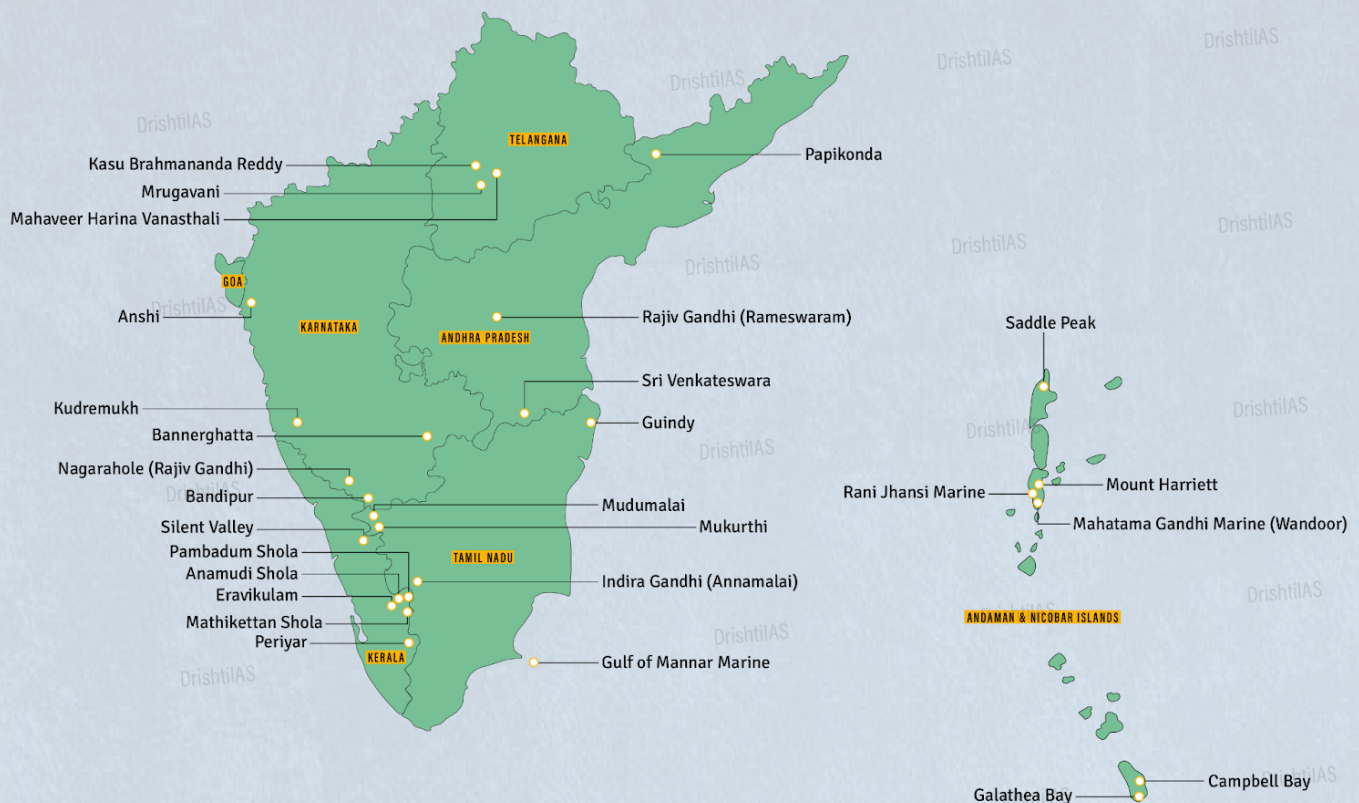
- **Conservation Reserves:** Conservation Reserves are areas designated under the **WPA** where wildlife and biodiversity are protected, but human activities, like grazing and firewood collection, are allowed under regulation.
 - These areas are created to buffer critical habitats, protect wildlife corridors, and conserve biodiversity outside heavily protected zones.
 - These areas **allow local communities to participate** in conservation efforts while maintaining sustainable livelihoods.
 - The **State Government** manages these areas with involvement from local stakeholders and conservationists.
- **Community Reserves:** [Community Reserves](#) are areas designated for conservation that involve direct participation from **local communities** in preserving natural resources and wildlife.
 - These reserves **can be set up on private or community-owned land**, with the goal of improving biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management.
 - Activities like **tourism, agriculture, and small-scale forest** product extraction are permissible as long as they align with conservation goals.
 - Managed by the **State Government**, but with significant input from local communities and [NGOs](#).

Regulating Authorities

- **Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC):** [MoEFCC](#) is the apex body responsible for wildlife conservation and forest management at the national level.
 - It formulates policies, guidelines, and provides funding for the development and maintenance of protected areas.
 - The **Wildlife Division** within **MoEFCC** oversees wildlife sanctuaries and national parks and ensures compliance with the WPA.
- **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL):** [NBWL](#) is an advisory body that provides recommendations on conservation issues, including approval for projects in or around protected areas.
 - It is also **responsible for approving new protected areas** and their management plans.
- **State Forest Departments:** Each state has its own **Forest Department** that manages the protected areas within its jurisdiction. The department is responsible for day-to-day operations, enforcement of protection laws, and monitoring wildlife populations.
 - These departments are also responsible for enforcing the [Forest \(Conservation\) Act, 1980](#), which regulates deforestation and land-use change in forest areas, including those that fall within protected areas.
- **Wildlife Protection Societies and NGOs:** Various wildlife conservation organisations, such as the **Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI)** and [WWF India](#), play a critical role in the on-ground protection of protected areas, monitoring illegal activities, and advocating for stronger conservation laws.

National Parks-IV

106 National Parks (2022)



ABOUT

- A national park can be notified by the state government for the preservation of its ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological, or zoological importance.
- The areas are secured under the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.
- No human activity is permitted inside the national park except for the ones permitted by the Chief Wildlife Warden of the state under the conditions given in the WPA.

FACTS

- Eravikulam National Park (Kerala): Famous for the natural habitat of Nilgiri Tahr, the endangered mountain goat. This is also the land of "Neelakurinji", the flower that blooms once in twelve years.
- Mukurthi National Park, Silent Valley, Wyanaad Wildlife Sanctuary (Kerala), Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park (Karnataka), and Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu) are the protected areas within Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve - first biosphere reserve in India established in the year 1986.



What are the Issues and Challenges Related to Protected Areas?

- **Encroachment and Developmental Activities:** There is growing pressure from infrastructure projects, including roads, industrial zones, and mining, which are increasingly encroaching on protected areas.
 - For example, proposals for road construction through [Kaziranga National Park](#) and the establishment of industrial zones near [Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary](#) have raised concerns about habitat destruction.
- **Lack of Enforcement and Monitoring:** One of the critical issues in the management of PAs is the lack of effective enforcement of laws.

- In some cases, protected areas are unable to prevent illegal activities due to **insufficient manpower, poor monitoring systems**, and **corruption**.
- **Conflicts Between Conservation and Development:** The tension between conservation and development interests often leads to policy conflicts.
 - In Assam, for instance, the **Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary** and **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary** have been subjects of such debates, with industrialists pushing for projects that threaten the ecological integrity of these areas.
- **Political and Institutional Failures:** The failure of local governments and forest departments to take timely and effective action against violations in protected areas has also led to the erosion of conservation efforts.
 - Political pressures sometimes override environmental concerns, as seen in the case of Assam's controversial approval for a road through the **Barak Bhuban Wildlife Sanctuary** or the planned hotel constructions near Kaziranga.
- **Community Resistance and Land Rights:** The imposition of conservation regulations often leads to conflicts with local communities, especially when their traditional livelihoods are disrupted.
- **Climate Change and Habitat Loss:** Many protected areas are facing the compounded threat of climate change, which alters habitats, shifts species' ranges, and increases the frequency of extreme weather events.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Strengthen Enforcement Mechanisms: Effective monitoring, patrolling, and surveillance** of protected areas are essential to prevent encroachment and illegal activities.
 - For instance, the recent death of elephants in **Bandhavgarh National Park** highlights a critical lapse in **wildlife management**. Such negligence must be addressed to prevent future tragedies in **protected areas**.
- **Clear Guidelines for Development Projects:** A more **transparent and robust mechanism** must be put in place for approving development projects near or within protected areas.
 - The guidelines should ensure that any proposed project undergoes a thorough environmental impact assessment, with specific measures to mitigate damage to wildlife habitats.
- **Inclusive Conservation Models: Local communities** must engage in conservation, with expanded conservation and community reserve models promoting sustainable livelihoods.
 - These models should include capacity-building programs to help communities develop alternative income sources that are not detrimental to wildlife.
- **Legal and Institutional Reforms:** The existing legal frameworks, while comprehensive, need better implementation. **The Forest (Conservation) Act and WPA** should be reinforced with stricter penalties for violations, and local government institutions should be made accountable for failing to uphold conservation laws.
 - **The National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has shown a proactive role in addressing violations, but the speed of legal processes needs improvement.
- **Addressing Climate Change Threats:** Protected areas vulnerable to **climate change** require **adaptive conservation strategies** addressing shifting environmental conditions.
- **Public Awareness and Advocacy:** Raising **public awareness** on **protected areas** and **wildlife** is crucial. **NGOs, activists, and media** must highlight **conservation** and promote **debate** on balancing **development** and **environmental protection**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate the need for clearer guidelines and robust mechanisms for approving development projects near protected areas, and how can such measures prevent harm to wildlife habitats?

Prelims:

Q. Which one of the following protected areas is wellknown for the conservation of a sub-species of the Indian swamp deer (Barasingha) that thrives well on hard ground and is exclusively graminivorous? (2020)

- (a) Kanha National Park
- (b) Manas National Park
- (c) Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary
- (d) Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary

Ans: (a)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/conserving-protected-areas-in-india>

