

1st National Guide to Grasslands & Other Open Natural Ecosystems

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment

Why in News?

India launched its first-ever Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems of India at UNCCD COP17, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in August 2026.

- **Pursues** - To move beyond the conventional classification of grasslands, deserts, scrublands and ravines as “wastelands” and recognise them as distinct ecosystems.
- **Developed by** - MoEFCC in collaboration with institutions including:
 - Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)
 - IUCN
 - Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management
 - Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education
 - ISRO’s Space Applications Centre
- **Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)** are naturally open landscapes with low tree density that cover roughly 10% of India's total land area
- These include ecosystems such as:
 - Grasslands
 - Savannas
 - Deserts
 - Scrublands
 - Ravines
 - Rocky plateaus
- They have their own biodiversity, soils, hydrology, fire regimes and carbon-storage functions.
- **Major Open Ecosystems in India** - Himalayan & Terai grasslands, Thar Desert, Banni Grasslands - Gujarat, Deccan Savannas, Aravalli Scrublands,
 - Yamuna-Chambal Ravines
 - Western Ghats rocky plateaus
 - Central Nicobar grasslands
 - Theri Kaadu scrub landscapes - Tamil Nadu
- **Importance** - These provide habitat for species such as Great Indian Bustard, Lesser Florican, Bengal Florican, Indian Wolf, Blackbuck.
 - Support pastoralism and livestock-based livelihoods.
 - Store significant amounts of below-ground carbon in roots and soils.
 - Fire, grazing and seasonal movement can form part of their natural ecological

processes.

- **Key concerns** - “Tree-centric” Restoration does not always help restore degraded grassland ecosystem.

Grassland ≠ degraded forest.

- Planting trees in naturally open ecosystems can:
 - Alter native habitats.
 - Affect species dependent on open landscapes.
 - Disturb soil-carbon stocks.
 - Disrupt traditional pastoral systems.

More tree cover does not automatically mean better ecological restoration.

- **Community-Based Management** -
- Traditional systems such as Orans and Gauchars represent community-based management of common resources.
- Pastoral communities associated with these landscapes include - Raikas - Rajasthan
 - Dhangars - Maharashtra
 - Gujjars & Bakarwals - Himalayas
 - Their practices include grazing, seasonal migration, fire and water management.

Significance

- The initiative is linked to India's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) commitments under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
- It highlights the need for landscape-level planning, better mapping and ecological monitoring.

Reference

[Down To Earth|1st National Guide to Grasslands And Other Open Natural Ecosystems](#)