Compensatory Afforestation for Increasing the Forest Cover

What is the issue?

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- Rules for the ‘Compensatory Afforestation Act’ haven’t been notified yet.
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- The government needs to stay invested and streamline its various programs for expanding the green cover in the country
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What is the Compensatory Afforestation Act, 2016?

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- Diversion of forests for non-forest use seems inevitable to some degree due to developmental activities and biotic pressures.
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- Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016, seeks to remedy this loss through disbursal of national and State funds for carrying out afforestation projects.
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- While 40,000 crores have already been accumulated for compensatory projects, the rules for the implementation of the act haven’t been drafted yet.
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- This reflects the government’s low resolve for environmental protection.
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- Notably, sequestration of carbon through sustainably managed forests is a key component of the commitment made under the Paris Agreement.
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What is the argument against Compensatory Afforestation?

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- Some argue that the Compensatory Afforestation as a concept is flawed.
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- Significantly, the evidence on compensatory afforestation in a big project such as the ‘Sardar Sarovar Dam’ is not encouraging.
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- While around 13,000 hectares were compensated there for afforestation, the outcomes were only patchy as biodiversity loss was immense.
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- Some areas saw healthy monoculture plantations albeit with low biodiversity value crop up, while others resulted in unhealthy plantations with few trees.
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- Also, it is worthy to note that the current method used to calculate the net present value of forests and its ecological services for carrying out afforestation drives, largely underestimates costs.
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What is to be done?

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- **Structuring Afforestation Drives** - Suitable lands for afforestastion that are preferably contiguous with protected areas needs to be identified.
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- These needs to be turned over for joint management by forest department staff and select experts groups.
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- There is already a Green India Mission, which is distinct from the framework envisaged for compensatory afforestation.
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- Hence, independent audits for all connected programmes are needed, in order to sensibly deploy the financial resources now available.
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- Most importantly, the rules for the current law on compensatory afforestation need to be structured and implemented immediately.
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- **Biodiversity Conservation -** However, it is important to recognize that replacing a natural forest with a plantation is not ideal.
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- Both wildlife and the forest-dwellers stand to lose considerably because of the sheer loss of biodiversity.
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- But there is immense potential to augment the services of forests through a

careful choice of plants and trees under the afforestation programme.
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Source: The Hindu

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