

## **Draft National Forest Policy - 2018**

### **What is the issue?**

\n\n

\n

- Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has recently released the “Draft National Forest Policy, 2018” for public comments.

\n

- This is a positive as a new forest policy that is in tune with the changed realities was long overdue.

\n

\n\n

### **How has India’s forest policy evolved?**

\n\n

\n

- Currently, the “National Forest Policy of 1988” is the primary document that drives India’s forest outlook.

\n

- This dates back to the times when climate change was a fuzzy concept, and even before economic liberalisation was undertaken.

\n

- While Forest Rights Act was passed in 2006, a comprehensive new forest policy that covers the new evolving concerns was needed.

\n

- Hence, the present draft on climate change concerns has factored in climate change concerns and management plans forest and wildlife.

\n

- It also talks of “safeguarding the livelihood of forest dependent people” and envisions raising the country’s forest cover from 25% to 30% of its land area.

\n

\n\n

### **What are the concerns with the draft forest policy?**

\n\n

\n

- It persists with the methodological weakness of the “Indian Forest Survey Reports” of the past 30 years that conflate plantations with forest cover.

\n

\n\n

\n

- It talks about improving the productivity of forest plantations by the intensive scientific management of commercially important species.
- While it does mention native plants like bamboo, it also stresses the need for plantations of exotics like eucalyptus and casuarina.
- These provisions seems to disregard the compelling evidence that plantations are no substitute for natural ecosystems that with good biodiversity.
- Ecologists vouch that nurturing natural ecosystems comprising of indigenous species are key for ecological sustainability and for climate change mitigation.
- Also, a 2015 study in Nature had cautioned against “promoting intensive forestry for maximum timber yield under the flag of climate change”.

\n

\n\n

### **How effective are forests in addressing climate change?**

\n\n

\n

- While the exotic vs. indigenous species debate is raging, some researchers claim that mere regeneration of forests isn’t enough to check global warming.

\n

\n\n

\n

- The efficiency of the “carbon cycle in forests” (which varies from forest to forest), is said to be a key factor for climate change mitigation.
- India has largely lacked nuanced studies to map forests and their carbon cycle potential and the draft policy doesn’t offer a roadmap to address these.
- Such concerns need to be addressed while finalising the new forest policy.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: Indian Express**

\n

