Draft National Forest Policy 2018

Why in news?

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Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) recently released the draft National Forest Policy 2018.

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What are the highlights?

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- **Objective** - The draft forest policy, 2018 will be an overarching policy for forest management.
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- It aims at bringing a minimum of one-third of India's total geographical area under forest or tree cover.
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- It seems to address the concern of decline in forest productivity.
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- **Concepts** - The draft has introduced some new concepts such as:
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i. economic valuation of ecosystem services
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ii. forest certification
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iii. national forest ecosystem management information system
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- **Approach** - The 1988 forest policy had a local community- and ecology-centric approach.
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- From this, the new draft shifts the focus to timber and forest-based

industries.
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- It identifies “production forestry” and plantations as the new thrust area.
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- **Tribal to Timber** - The importance offered to the rights of local, forest-dependent communities are being diluted.
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- It is substituted by the demand for raw material from forest-based industries.
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- The draft aims to use degraded land available with forest corporations to produce “quality timber”.
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- This goes against the emphasis on “fuelwood and fodder development” as in 1988 policy.
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- **Production forestry** - The 1988 policy had sections called ‘Rights and Concessions’ and ‘Tribal People and Forests’.
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- These are replaced by ideas of 'Production Forestry', increasing the productivity of forest plantations and facilitating forest industry interface.
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- **Industry** - The draft stresses the need to stimulate growth in the forest based industry sector.
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- It encourages forest corporations and industrial units to step up growing of industrial plantations.
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- **Livelihood** - The current draft mentions about the livelihoods of local communities -
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i. as passive recipients of benefits accruing from wildlife tourism
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ii. as labour for forest-based industries
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iii. in relation to non-timber forest produce (NTFP)
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- **PPP** - The draft proposes a public-private partnership model for afforestation and reforestation activities.
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- This will be in “degraded forest areas and forest areas available with Forest Development Corporations and outside forests”.
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- **Plantation choice** - The draft recommends 'commercially important species' like poplar and eucalyptus.
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- Both of these are non-indigenous plantation species.
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- **Protection measures** - The policy proposes to restrict schemes and projects which interfere with forests that cover steep slopes.
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- Catchments of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, geologically unstable terrain and such other ecologically sensitive areas are also covered.
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- The ecologically sensitive catchment areas shall be stabilized with suitable soil and water conservation measures.
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- Planting suitable trees and grass like bamboo in these areas is also suggested.
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- **Mechanism** - It suggests setting up of two national-level bodies for better management of the country’s forests.
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- These are the National Community Forest Management (CFM) Mission and the National Board of Forestry (NBF).
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- NBF will have to be headed by the central minister in charge of forests.
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- The state boards of forestry will have to ensure inter-sectoral convergence, simplification of procedures, conflict resolution, etc.
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- The state boards of forestry will have to be headed by state ministers in charge of forests.
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- Besides, efforts will be made to achieve harmonization between policies and laws like Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006.
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- **Community participation** - Efforts to ensure synergy between gram sabha & JFMC (Joint Forest Management Committee) will be taken up.
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- This is for ensuring successful community participation in forest management.
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- The CFM mission will address participatory forest management.

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- **Financing** - The compensatory afforestation fund which is being transferred to the states will provide for management of forests.
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- It will source afforestation and rehabilitation works in degraded forest areas and for bringing new areas under forest and tree cover.
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- Efforts for tapping funds from other national sectors will be taken up.
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- This may include rural development, tribal affairs, national highways, railways, coal, mines, power, etc.
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- **Forest fire** - The draft policy includes measures to safeguard ecosystems from forest fires, which include:
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i. mapping the vulnerable areas
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ii. developing and strengthening early warning systems
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iii. remote sensing technology to control fire
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iv. improved community participation
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- **Climate change** - Forests are natural carbon sinks, assisting in climate change mitigation.
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- Climate change concerns will be factored in all forest and wildlife areas working/management plans and Community Ecosystem Management Plans.
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- Wildlife rich areas and corridors outside protected areas would be identified and maintained for ensuring ecological and genetic continuity.
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- **Human-wildlife conflict** - Quick response, dedicated teams of well equipped and trained personnel would be developed.
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- Health and veterinary services, rescue centres, speedy assessment of damage and quick payment of relief to the victims are other short term actions.
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- Monitoring and management of population of wildlife would be adopted as part of long-term measures.
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Source: The Wire, Livemint

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