Global Forest Goals Report 2026

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Biodiversity

Why in News?

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat recently released the Global Forest Goals Report 2026.

> *The assessment warns that the world is falling short of its forest restoration targets, with fuelwood demand emerging as a critical driver of degradation.*

Findings of the Report

Forest Cover and Loss

- **Global Decline -** Total forest cover dropped from 4.18 billion hectares (2015) to 4.14 billion hectares (2025).
- **Primary Forest Depletion -** Nearly 16 million hectares of primary (untouched) forests were lost in the last decade, with South America witnessing the steepest decline.
- **Agricultural Expansion -** Remains the single largest driver of global deforestation due to land conversion for crops and livestock.

The Fuelwood and Energy Crisis

- **Fuelwood & Charcoal -** Rising demand for wood-based energy has overtaken other factors as a primary cause of forest degradation (the thinning of forests without total removal), particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia.
- **Poverty Link -** This highlights the persistent gap in access to clean cooking energy and the link between energy poverty and environmental health.

Climate and Restoration Challenges

- **Climate Pressures -** Intensifying droughts, record-breaking heatwaves, and wildfires are accelerating the weakening of forest ecosystems.
- **The Restoration Gap -** While 91 countries pledged to restore 190 million hectares, only **44 million hectares (approx. 23%)** were actually restored by 2025.
- **Asia's Leadership -** Asia emerged as the best-performing region in restoration, accounting for over **31 million hectares** of the total restored area globally.

Implications and Recommendations

- **Carbon Sink Weakening -**Degradation reduces the ability of forests to sequester carbon,

creating a dangerous feedback loop for global warming.

- **Biodiversity Threat -** The loss of primary forests is irreversible in human timescales and threatens millions of endemic species.
- **Sustainable Supply Chains -** The report calls for "deforestation-free" global supply chains and stronger governance to regulate timber and charcoal trade.

For Reference: Down to Earth | IAS Parliament

