Plantations are Forests – Says Forest Survey

What is the issue?

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- The latest “Forest Survey of India” report has changed the calculation method for India’s forest cover to include plantations on private lands.
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- This is not just naive but also deceptive and runs the risk of seeing conservation funds being diverted to satiate private interests.
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Why is the resent change in the classification problematic?

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- It is common knowledge that private plantations of teak, eucalyptus and poplar are undertaken to earn incomes.
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- Such plantations can’t be substitutes for natural forests with their wildlife and immense biodiversity.
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- Natural forests have multiple ecosystem functions, none of which can be provided by commercial plantations.
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- Classifying tree plantations as forests is hence a fallacy that ignores the reams of research and evidence which show otherwise.
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- Hence, there is suspicion that the move is intended to aid private profits by relaxing restrictions and siphoning off conservation funds.
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How does the ecological conservation scenario look?

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- Data shows that there is a clear increase in average global temperatures due to the rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
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- Frequency of heat-waves, floods, droughts, and unseasonal rainfall is also increasing – all of which are thought to be the effects of global warming.
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- Protecting and restoring natural forests (not plantations) is one of the best ways to mitigate climate change.
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- Some argue that private funds can be mobilised by classifying plantations as forest, but they seem to be ignoring the ecological cost of such a move.
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- Besides, more than $7 billion of public “Compensatory Afforestation Fund” (CAF) is lying unused currently – which needs to be used up effectively.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Multiple peasant and tribal communities have for long worked for the conservation of their neighbourhood forests.
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- Tribal claims of ownership over the use of sustainable forest resources have now been legally recognized by under the “Forest Rights Act of 2006”.
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- Bettering the implementation of the act and strengthened cooperation with grassroots institutions are vital to further conservation efforts.
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- Governments should consider devolving afforestation funds to the gram sabhas and build a sustained movement for conserving forests.
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Source: The Hindu

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