



SACRED GROVES: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Formulate policy to manage sacred groves, Supreme Court tells government

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to formulate a policy for preserving sacred groves, highlighting their ecological and cultural importance. Sacred groves, protected by local communities, are biodiversity hotspots crucial for conservation and climate regulation.

1. Supreme Court's Directive

- The **Supreme Court** has asked the Centre to formulate a policy to manage sacred groves, recognizing their cultural and ecological importance.
- Directed the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** to:
 - Conduct a nationwide survey to identify sacred groves and their boundaries.
 - Protect sacred groves from unauthorized land use.

2. Importance of Sacred Groves

- **Ecological Significance:**
 - **Biodiversity hotspots:** Provide habitat for rare, endangered, and endemic species.
 - **Gene pool conservation:** Serve as reservoirs of genetic diversity crucial for research and ecological restoration.
 - **Watershed protection:** Regulate water flow, prevent soil erosion, and recharge groundwater.
 - **Climate regulation:** Act as carbon sinks, contributing to carbon sequestration and moderating local climates.
- **Cultural and Social Significance:**
 - **Cultural heritage:** Closely tied to spiritual and traditional practices of local communities.
 - **Preserve traditional knowledge:** Maintain indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants and sustainable resource use.

3. Regional Names and Examples of Sacred Groves

- **India:**



- Devrai (Maharashtra), Koil Kadu (Tamil Nadu), Kavu (Kerala), Sarna (Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal), Umang Lai (Manipur), Kothi (Himachal Pradesh).
- **Global Examples:**
 - Church forests (Ethiopia), Kaya forests (Kenya), Fengshui woodlands (China), Nemeton (Celtic regions).

4. Threats to Sacred Groves

- **Deforestation:** Encroachment for agriculture, urbanization, and infrastructure projects.
- **Over-exploitation:** Unsustainable extraction of timber, firewood, and medicinal plants.
- **Invasive species:** Disrupt the native ecological balance.
- **Pollution:** Contamination from nearby industrial and agricultural activities.
- **Tourism pressure:** Unregulated religious tourism can degrade habitats.
- **Erosion of traditional beliefs:** Weakening of cultural practices that traditionally protected these groves.

5. Example of Community Action

- **Piplantri Village (Rajasthan):** Community-driven afforestation efforts transformed barren lands into lush green groves, addressing ecological challenges like desertification.





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