

GLOBAL FOREST WATCH: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: India lost 18,200 hectares of primary forest in 2024: Global data

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India lost 18,200 hectares of primary forest in 2024, with fire-related deforestation and primary forest degradation on the rise despite a drop in overall tree cover loss. Strengthened legal frameworks, community rights, and technology-driven monitoring are essential to reversing this trend.

Context: India's Forest Loss in 2024

- India lost **18,200 hectares of primary forest in 2024**, up from 17,700 hectares in 2023, as per Global Forest Watch (GFW) data.
- Although there is a reduction in overall tree cover loss, the **loss of humid primary forests has increased**, raising serious environmental concerns.

Global Findings on Forest Loss (2024)

- **6.7 million hectares** of tropical primary forests were lost globally, nearly **double the 2023 figures**.
- **Fires became the leading cause of tropical forest loss** (for the first time in 20+ years), accounting for about 50% of global forest loss.
- The **El Niño phenomenon** and **climate change** caused extreme heat and drought, making forests highly vulnerable to fires.
- **Brazil** accounted for 42% of the total global tropical forest loss.
- **Bolivia** saw a **200% spike in forest loss**, overtaking the **Democratic Republic of Congo** for the first time.

India-Specific Findings (2024)

- **Overall Tree Cover Loss** decreased by **6.9%** from 2023 to 2024, showing some improvement in general forest management.
- **Humid primary forest loss increased by 5.9%**, reflecting challenges in preserving old-growth forests.
- **Fire-related primary forest loss rose sharply to 950 ha**, marking a **158% increase** from the previous year.
- **Northeastern states** such as Assam, Nagaland, and Mizoram emerged as **forest loss hotspots** due to:
 - Shifting cultivation
 - Agricultural expansion
 - Commercial logging

- According to the **UN FAO**, between 2015–2020, **India had the second-highest deforestation rate globally**, losing approximately **668,000 hectares annually**.

India's Initiatives to Combat Forest Loss

Policy and Legislative Measures

- **Forest Conservation Act, 1980 (Amended 2023):**
 - Regulates diversion of forest land for non-forest use.
 - The 2023 amendment aims to simplify processes but needs ecological scrutiny.
- **National Forest Policy, 1988:**
 - Aims to ensure that **33% of India's geographical area** is under forest or tree cover.
- **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (CAMPA), 2016:**
 - Mandates that funds collected for forest diversion are used for afforestation and restoration.

Afforestation and Reforestation Programs

- **Green India Mission:**
 - Part of the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**.
 - Focuses on ecosystem services and enhancing forest carbon sinks.
- **State-Level Initiatives:**
 - Example: **Uttar Pradesh's plan to plant 35 crore saplings in 2025** to expand green cover.

Community Engagement and Rights-Based Approaches

- **Joint Forest Management (JFM):**
 - Involves collaboration between **local communities and forest departments** in forest care and protection.
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:**
 - Recognizes **legal rights of forest-dwelling communities**, empowering them to sustainably manage forest resources.

Technological Interventions

- **Satellite Monitoring:**
 - Real-time data used to detect **forest degradation, illegal logging, and fires**.
- **Mobile Applications:**

- Apps like **‘My Plants’** allow public participation and monitoring of plantation efforts.

International Collaborations

- **Forest-PLUS 3.0** (Partnership for Land Use Science):
 - A **U.S.-India initiative** to strengthen sustainable forestry practices and build climate resilience.

About Global Forest Watch (GFW)

- Established by the **World Resources Institute (WRI)** in 1997.
- A web-based platform for **monitoring global forest change**.
- Provides **near real-time data**, accessible to governments, NGOs, researchers, and the public.
- Offers tools for tracking deforestation, alerts, and analysis by region or country.

Way Ahead for India

Empower Local Communities

- Speed up recognition of **Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights** under the FRA, 2006.
- Strengthen local forest governance through **legal empowerment** of indigenous and forest-dependent people.

Leverage Technology for Better Monitoring

- Integrate **AI, drones, and satellite imagery** for forest health monitoring.
- Enable **predictive analytics** to forecast fire risks and deforestation hotspots.

Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Review and refine **amendments to the Forest Conservation Act** to balance **development with ecological safeguards**.
- Ensure **stringent protection of primary forests and biodiversity hotspots**.

Promote Sustainable Livelihoods and Eco-Tourism

- Encourage **agroforestry models** that mix agriculture with tree cultivation.
- Develop **community-based eco-tourism** as an alternative income source while preserving forest ecosystems.

Source: https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/india-lost-18-200-hectares-of-primary-forest-in-2024-global-data-125052101149_1.html