
4. Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023

Why in News?

- Recently, The government introduced the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023 in Lok Sabha and proposed changes to the Forest (Conservation) Act, (FC) 1980.

Highlights

- The aim of the proposed changes is to build forest carbon stock by raising plantations. The Bill also seeks to make land available for compensatory afforestation.
- After Independence, vast areas of forest land were designated as reserved and protected forests.
- However, many forested areas were left out, and areas without any standing forests were included in ‘forest’ lands.
- In 1996, the Supreme Court suspended the felling of trees across the country, and ruled that the FC Act would apply to all land parcels that were either recorded as ‘forest’ or resembled the dictionary meaning of forest.
- In June 2022, the government amended the Forest Conservation Rules to propose a mechanism to allow developers to raise plantations “over land on which the (FC) Act is not applicable” and to swap such plots against subsequent requirements of compensatory afforestation.
- The Act restricts the de-reservation of forest or use of forest land for non-forest purposes. Such restrictions may be lifted with the prior approval of the central government. Non-forest purposes include use of land for cultivating horticultural crops or for any purpose other than reforestation.
- The Bill adds more activities to this list such as:
 - (i) zoos and safaris under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 owned by the government or any authority, in forest areas other than protected areas,
 - (ii) eco-tourism facilities,
 - (iii) silvicultural operations (enhancing forest growth), and
 - (iv) any other purpose specified by the central government.