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## **1. The latest study on global forest cover must be taken with a pinch of salt**

- What are the key findings of study?**
- What are the limitations of assessment of Forests?**
- What is the difference between Forest Cover and Recorded Forest Area?**
- What are the measures taken by government of India for forest cover growth?**

### **GS paper 3 ( Conservation )**

**In this video, you can find detailed answers for all the above questions.**

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**What is the context about?**

A new study published in Nature, a multidisciplinary science journal, has said the global tree canopy cover has increased by 2.24 million square kilometres between 1982 and 2016.

**What are the key findings of study?**

Using satellite data, researchers found that the gains made in forest area in the temperate, subtropical, and boreal climatic zones are neutralising the decline that is taking place in the tropics.

- ❑ Interestingly, the study adds, forests in mountain regions are expanding as climate-warming enables trees to grow higher up on mountains.
- ❑ The greatest increase in tree canopy has occurred in Europe, including European Russia (35%).
- ❑ A close second was China, where tree canopy gained 34%. In the US, tree canopy increased by 15%.
- ❑ The important finding is that much of the change is nevertheless anthropogenic; climate change induced vegetation growth is a smaller fraction.

### **What are the limitations of assessment of Forests?**

- ❑ The Nature study uses three land-cover categories: tree crops; short vegetation cover; and bare ground. The issue with such categorisation is that “tree crops” could be anything: natural forest, teak plantations, eucalyptus plantations or coconut/arecanut/rubber plantations. But tree covers are not forests, and so telling us about “changes in tree cover” is not very useful.
- ❑ Second, the reported expansion of “tree cover”, according to the new study, is happening in temperate countries, including temperate parts of China but not so much in the tropics or part of the subtropics. While the

study published in Nature does not give countrywise figures, the main change reported for south Asia is bare ground becoming short vegetation cover.

- ❑ It is not just the number of trees, but the biodiversity that it nurtures, and so one must always be aware of the difference between a forest cover and tree cover.

### **What is the difference between Forest Cover and Recorded Forest Area?**

- ❑ The term Forest Cover refers to all lands more than one hectare in area with a tree canopy of more than 10% irrespective of land use, ownership and legal status. It may include even orchards, bamboo, and palm.
- ❑ On the other hand Forest Area refers to all the geographic areas recorded as 'Forest' in government records under Indian Forests Act, 1927 and under other respective local acts. Such areas with less than 10% tree cover such as cold deserts, alpine pastures will be excluded from the assessment.
- ❑ Technological and methodological advances enabled FSI to classify forest cover into three types.
  - ✓ Very Dense Forest (Canopy Density >70%)
  - ✓ Moderately Dense Forest (canopy density is 40% to 70%)
  - ✓ Open Forest (Canopy density 10% to 40%)

## **What are the measures taken by government of India for forest cover growth?**

- ❑ National policies like Green India Mission, National Agro-Forestry policy (NAP), REDD plus policy, Joint Forest Management (JFM), National Afforestation Programme and funds under Compensatory Afforestation to states.
- ❑ Successful agro-forestry practices, better conservation of forests, improvement of scrub areas to forest areas, increase in mangrove cover, conservation and protection activities, among other things, have all led to an increase in forest and tree cover.
- ❑ This can be further enhanced by steps like the Green Highways (Plantations & Maintenance) Policy to develop a 1,40,000 km-long treeline with plantation along both sides of national highways.