

UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · [UJIYARI.COM](https://ujiyari.com)

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

## 2.8 Million Trees on the Ledger: The Arithmetic of Forest Loss

 DOWN TO EARTH

9 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GS3

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

**BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**[bharatnotes.com](https://bharatnotes.com) → **ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 [epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)



# 2.8 Million Trees on the Ledger: The Arithmetic of Forest Loss

Down to Earth 9 July 2026 **GS3**

Source: [ujjyari.com](https://ujjyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## THE LIFT LINE

You can plant a sapling for every tree you fell and still be poorer, because a forest is not a number of trees, it is the decades those trees have already lived.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The Down To Earth finding that more than 2.8 million trees on forest land were cleared for felling in under three years is a hard number that opens up the whole GS3 debate on forest governance: the diversion of forest land for projects, the law that governs it, and the compensatory-afforestation machinery meant to make good the loss. It also raises the development-versus-environment tension that recurs across the syllabus.

**GS Paper 3:** conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; [environmental impact assessment](https://ujjyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/) (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/>); infrastructure and its effect on the environment.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, renamed the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam through the 2023 amendment; the Advisory Committee that vets diversion proposals; and CAMPA, the fund that holds compensatory-afforestation money. For **Mains**, argue that plantation does not equal forest, and that the clearance regime needs stronger, not weaker, scrutiny.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, any use of forest land for a non-forest purpose, mining, dams, roads, [rehabilitation](https://ujjyari.com/vocab/rehabilitation/) (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/rehabilitation/>), requires central approval, and the developer must pay for compensatory afforestation and the net present value of the forest lost. The 2023 amendment renamed the law the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam and narrowed the definition of “forest” and the range of activities requiring clearance, changes critics warned would ease diversion.

Against that backdrop, Down To Earth examined the minutes of the environment ministry's Advisory Committee for the roughly three-year window from July 2023 to May 2026. The tally: over 2.8 million trees on forest land approved for felling or recorded as felled, across more than 22,000 hectares diverted for non-forestry projects in 27 sectors. Of 288 unique diversion proposals considered, more than 242 were cleared, an approval rate above 80 per cent. Mining, hydropower and rehabilitation projects together accounted for close to 90 per cent of the trees, with mining alone at about 1.35 million and hydropower at about 0.93 million; Chhattisgarh saw the highest number.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

### Diversion has become routine

An approval rate above 80 per cent tells its own story. When the overwhelming majority of proposals clear the committee, the clearance process reads less like a filter and more like a formality. The concern is not that any single project is unjustified but that the system as a whole tilts toward approval, treating forest land as a resource to be reallocated rather than an asset to be defended.

### Compensatory afforestation cannot balance the books

The law's promise is that felled forest is replaced: money flows into CAMPA and plantations rise elsewhere. But a plantation is not the ecosystem it replaces. A newly planted patch lacks the age, structure, soil and species web of a mature natural forest, and much afforestation happens on degraded or non-forest land, sometimes displacing local communities. The 2.8 million felled trees are real and immediate; the replacement, where it succeeds at all, is thin and decades away.

| METRIC (JUL 2023 TO MAY 2026) | FIGURE                         | WHAT IT SIGNALS                  |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Trees approved or felled      | Over 2.8 million               | Scale of standing-forest loss    |
| Forest land diverted          | Over 22,000 hectares           | Habitat converted to project use |
| Proposals cleared             | 242+ of 288, over 80%          | Weak filtering at the committee  |
| Top drivers                   | Mining 1.35M, hydropower 0.93M | Extraction and energy dominate   |

### The amendment deepens the worry

By narrowing what counts as forest and what needs clearance, the 2023 amendment risks moving still more land out of the protective net entirely, so that future felling never even reaches the ledger Down To Earth was able to count.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Ujjayi Current Affairs - [ujjayi.com](https://ujjayi.com) · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

Distinguish stock from flow, and natural capital from planted capital. A mature forest is accumulated natural capital, carbon, biodiversity and hydrology built over decades; felling draws down that stock instantly, while afforestation adds a slow, uncertain flow. The transferable rule: an accounting system that equates a felled old-growth tree with a freshly planted sapling is measuring the wrong thing, and any clearance regime built on that equivalence will systematically understate what is being lost.

## THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Project demand (mining + hydropower + rehabilitation) → diversion proposals to Advisory Committee → over 80% approved → 2.8 million trees felled on 22,000+ ha → compensatory afforestation via CAMPA → saplings replace mature forest → stock lost now, thin flow decades later → net natural-capital loss; 2023 amendment narrows the net further

## WAY FORWARD

- ① **Tighten the clearance filter.** Restore rigorous, independent scrutiny of diversion proposals so that an 80 per cent approval rate reflects merit, not routine.
- ② **Value forests honestly.** Ensure the net-present-value and compensatory mechanisms fully price mature-forest services, and audit whether afforestation actually survives and functions.
- ③ **Prioritise avoidance and alternatives.** Push projects toward non-forest land and low-impact designs before diversion, following the [mitigation](https://ujjayi.com/vocab/mitigation/) (<https://ujjayi.com/vocab/mitigation/>) hierarchy of avoid, minimise, then compensate.
- ④ **Protect the definition of forest.** Read the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam so that ecologically significant land stays within the clearance net rather than outside it.

## PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about forest conservation, [compensatory afforestation](https://ujjayi.com/terms/compensatory-afforestation/) (<https://ujjayi.com/terms/compensatory-afforestation/>) and CAMPA, and about balancing development with environmental protection. This editorial links those themes to a specific 2026 data analysis.

**Practice question:** “Compensatory afforestation cannot substitute for the loss of natural forest.” Critically examine in light of India’s forest-diversion record and the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023. (250 words, 15 marks)

**Sources:** *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/forests/over-28-million-trees-on-forest-land-approved-for-felling-in-three-years-dte-analysis-finds>)

~~Source: 2.8 Million Trees on the Ledger: The Arithmetic of Forest Loss - Ujjayi.com | Free UPSC & State PCS~~  
Ujjayi Current Affairs · ujjayi.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS  
Editorial Analysis

## RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

9 Jul **NTCA 29th Meeting: STRIDES 2026 and the Roadmap to...**

8 Jul **El Nino 2026 Could Strain India's Power Grid**

6 Jul **The Asiatic Lion and the Case for a Second Home**

6 Jul **Canscora agni: A New Fire-Loving Plant of India's...**

Ujiyari Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](https://ujiyari.com) · ~~Free Daily~~ Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[in linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/dte-forest-diversion-tree-felling-2026/>

### ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

## BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → \[bharatnotes.com\]\(https://bharatnotes.com\)](#)

### 📌 OPPORTUNITY

## Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

**Ideal for:** Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](https://ujiyari.com) · [bharatnotes.com](https://bharatnotes.com)