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National CAMPA Approves Four Species Projects and Aastha Van Yojana

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National CAMPA Approves Four Species Projects and Aastha Van Yojana

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WHY IN NEWS

On July 10, 2026, the 7th Governing Body meeting of the National Compensatory Afforestation (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/compensatory-afforestation/>) Fund Management and Planning Authority (National CAMPA), chaired by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav at the Central Academy for State Forest Service (CASFOS), Coimbatore, approved four species recovery projects and a new Aastha Van Sanrakshan Yojana of about Rs 3,000 crore to conserve nearly 15,000 sacred groves.

BACKGROUND: WHAT CAMPA FUNDS ARE

Every time forest land is diverted for a non-forest use such as a road, dam or mine, the user agency must pay for **compensatory afforestation** and for the loss of ecological services from the felled forest. These payments accumulate as a large national corpus. The **Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016** created a statutory (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/statutory/>) framework to hold and spend this money, establishing a **National CAMPA** at the Centre and State CAMPAs in each state.

Historically the corpus was used mainly for planting trees, **catchment** (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/catchment/>) treatment and forest infrastructure. The July 10 decisions signal a widening of that mandate, channelling compensatory-afforestation resources into **flagship-species recovery** and **community-conserved landscapes**, so that the fund restores living ecosystems and not merely tree cover.

THE FOUR SPECIES RECOVERY PROJECTS

The Governing Body cleared four dedicated conservation programmes, each targeting a species or group whose survival is an indicator of wider ecosystem health.

River Dolphins Conservation and Recovery Action Plan. The **Ganges river dolphin** is India's **National Aquatic Animal** and is listed as **Endangered on the IUCN Red List**. A blind, echo-locating mammal of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Indus systems, it is a sentinel of river health. The plan builds on the momentum of Project Dolphin.

Project Snow Leopard Phase-II. This launches a **second population estimation cycle** for the **snow leopard (Panthera uncia)**, an IUCN **Vulnerable** high-altitude cat of the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan region. The first Status of Snow Leopards in India assessment gave the country a baseline; Phase-II updates it.

Indian Rhinoceros Action Plan. The **greater one-horned rhinoceros**, concentrated in Assam's Kaziranga and other grassland habitats, anchors this plan. Once critically depleted, the species has recovered through strict protection, and the plan aims to consolidate and expand populations.

Wild Water Buffalo conservation programme. A **pan-India** effort for the wild water buffalo, a threatened bovid whose small, fragmented populations survive mainly in central and north-eastern India and face genetic dilution from interbreeding with domestic stock.

PROJECT	FOCAL SPECIES	KEY STATUS
River Dolphins Action Plan	Ganges river dolphin	National Aquatic Animal; IUCN Endangered
Project Snow Leopard Phase-II	Snow leopard (Panthera uncia)	IUCN Vulnerable; 2nd estimation cycle
Indian Rhinoceros Action Plan	Greater one-horned rhinoceros	Recovery species, grassland habitat
Wild Water Buffalo programme	Wild water buffalo	Pan-India; threatened, fragmented

AASTHA VAN SANRAKSHAN YOJANA

The meeting also approved the **Aastha Van Sanrakshan Yojana**, a scheme of about **Rs 3,000 crore over five years** to conserve nearly **15,000 sacred groves** across the country. Sacred groves are patches of forest protected by local communities on religious or cultural grounds and left largely undisturbed. Known regionally as **kavu** in Kerala, **devrai** or **deorai** in Maharashtra, **oran** in Rajasthan, **sarna** in Jharkhand and **law kyntang** in Meghalaya, they are living examples of **community-conserved areas** that harbour rare plants, old-growth trees and undisturbed micro-habitats.

By funding their protection, the scheme recognises that conservation in India rests not only on state-managed protected areas but also on **community stewardship** and cultural tradition. It links biodiversity protection with intangible heritage, turning faith-based conservation into a formal policy instrument.

ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

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Together the decisions mark a maturing of the compensatory-afforestation idea. Using CAMPA funds for **species recovery** and **sacred-grove protection** moves the corpus beyond plantation targets toward measurable ecological outcomes. The risk is that money flows faster than institutional capacity to spend it well; success will depend on **credible population baselines**, transparent state-level utilisation and genuine involvement of local communities who guard the groves. If delivered honestly, the package could knit together flagship-species science, river and grassland restoration, and grassroots conservation into a single funded framework.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3: Conservation, environmental funds and institutions, biodiversity, community conservation, flagship-species management.

Prelims pointers:

- National CAMPA is governed by the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016.
- The Ganges river dolphin is India's National Aquatic Animal and is IUCN Endangered.
- The snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) is IUCN Vulnerable.
- Sacred groves are community-conserved areas known as kavu, devrai, oran, sarna and law kyntang in different states.
- The 7th National CAMPA Governing Body meeting was chaired by Bhupender Yadav at CASFOS, Coimbatore.

Mains question: “Compensatory afforestation funds are increasingly being directed toward species recovery and community-conserved areas. Examine how flagship-species projects and the protection of sacred groves can strengthen India's biodiversity conservation, and the governance safeguards such spending requires.” (15 marks, 250 words)

FACTS CORNER

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National CAMPA: Statutory authority under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016, managing compensatory-afforestation funds.

7th Governing Body meeting: Held July 10, 2026, at CASFOS, Coimbatore, chaired by Bhupender Yadav.

Four projects: River Dolphins Action Plan, Project Snow Leopard Phase-II, Indian Rhinoceros Action Plan, Wild Water Buffalo programme.

Aastha Van Sanrakshan Yojana: About Rs 3,000 crore over 5 years to conserve nearly 15,000 sacred groves.

Ganges river dolphin: National Aquatic Animal, IUCN Endangered.

Snow leopard (Panthera uncia): IUCN Vulnerable.

Sources: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (<https://moef.gov.in/>), Press Information Bureau (<https://pib.gov.in/>), DD News (<https://ddnews.gov.in/>)

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