

# ESZs and their Significance

written by iasexam.com | 25/06/2022



## [GS Paper 3 - Environment and Ecology, Conservation]

**Context** - Farmers in Kerala continue to protest across several high ranges of the state against the Supreme Court's recent order to establish 1-km Eco-Sensitive Zones around all protected areas, wildlife sanctuaries, and national parks.

### About ESZs

- Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) or Ecologically Fragile Areas (EFAs) are areas notified by the MoEFCC around Protected Areas, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- The purpose of declaring ESZs is to create some kind of “shock absorbers” to the protected areas by regulating and managing the activities around such areas.
- They also act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.

### Demarcation of ESZs

- The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 does NOT mention the word “Eco-Sensitive

Zones”.

- However, Section 3(2)(v) of the Act, says that the Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries, operations or processes shall be carried out or shall not, subject to certain safeguards.
- Besides Rule 5(1) of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 states that the central government can prohibit or restrict the location of industries and carry on certain operations or processes on the basis of certain considerations.
- The same criteria have been used by the government to declare No Development Zones (NDZs).
- An ESZ could go up to 10 kilometres around a protected area as provided in the Wildlife Conservation Strategy, 2002.
- Moreover, in the case where sensitive corridors, connectivity and ecologically important patches, crucial for landscape linkage, are beyond 10 km width, these should be included in the ESZs.
- Further, even in the context of a particular Protected Area, the distribution of an area of ESZ and the extent of regulation may not be uniform all around and it could be of variable width and extent.

## Permitted and Prohibited Activities in and around ESZs

- **Permitted** - Ongoing agricultural or horticultural practices, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, use of renewable energy sources, and adoption of green technology for all activities.
- **Prohibited** - Commercial mining, saw mills, industries causing pollution (air, water, soil, noise etc), the establishment of major hydroelectric projects (HEP), commercial use of wood, Tourism activities like hot-air balloons over the National Park, discharge of effluents or any solid waste or production of hazardous substances.
- **Under Regulation** - Felling of trees, the establishment of hotels and resorts, commercial use of natural water, erection of electrical cables, drastic change of agriculture system, e.g. adoption of heavy technology, pesticides etc, widening of roads.

## Significance of ESZs

- To minimize the impact of urbanization and other developmental activities, areas adjacent to protected areas have been declared as Eco-Sensitive Zones.
- The purpose of declaring eco-sensitive zones around protected areas is for creating some kind of a ‘Shock Absorber’ for the protected area.
- They also act as a transition zone from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
- ESZs help in in-situ conservation, which deals with conservation of an endangered species in its natural habitat, for example the conservation of the One-horned Rhino of Kaziranga National Park, Assam.
- Eco-Sensitive Zones minimize forest depletion and man-animal conflict. The protected areas are based on the core and buffer model of management, through which local

area communities are also protected and benefitted.

## Recent SC Judgment

- On June 3, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court heard a PIL that sought to protect forest lands in the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu, but was later expanded to cover the entire country.
- In its judgment, the court, while referring to the 2011 guidelines as “reasonable”, directed all states to have a mandatory 1-km ESZ from the demarcated boundaries of every protected area.
- It also stated that no new permanent structure or mining will be permitted within the ESZ. If the existing ESZ goes beyond 1-km buffer zone or if any statutory instrument prescribes a higher limit, then such extended boundary shall prevail, the court.

### Reasons behind the Protests

- There is a high density of human population near the notified protected areas.
- Farmer’s groups and political parties have been demanding that all human settlements be exempt from the ESZ ruling.
- The total extent of the wildlife sanctuaries in Kerala is eight lakh acres.
- If one-km of ESZ is demarcated from their boundaries, around 4 lakh acres of human settlements, including farmlands, would come within that purview.

### Way Forward

Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, reducing climate change impacts by promoting carbon footprints and through education, is needed. Conservation techniques, awareness about overexploitation of resources and its adverse impacts should be propagated among masses.