**What is a forest?**

**The forest is a complex ecosystem consisting mainly of trees that buffer the earth and support a myriad of life forms.** The trees help create a special environment which, in turn, affects the kinds of animals and plants that can exist in the forest. Trees are an important component of the environment. They clean the air, cool it on hot days, conserve heat at night, and act as excellent sound absorbers.

Plants provide a protective canopy that lessens the impact of raindrops on the soil, thereby reducing soil erosion. The layer of leaves that fall around the tree prevents runoff and allows the water to percolate into the soil. Roots help to hold the soil in place. Dead plants decompose to form humus, organic matter that holds the water and provides nutrients to the soil. Plants provide habitat to different types of organisms. Birds build their nests on the branches of trees, animals and birds live in the hollows, insects and other organisms live in various parts of the plant. They produce large quantities of oxygen and take in carbon dioxide. Transpiration from the forests affects the relative humidity and precipitation in a place.

The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) has defined forest as land with tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10% and area of more than 0.5 hectare. The trees should be able to reach a minimum height of 5 m at maturity in situ. Forests are further subdivided into plantations and natural forests. Natural forests are forests composed mainly of indigenous trees not deliberately planted. Plantations are forest stands established by planting or seeding, or both, in the process of afforestation or reforestation.

Forests can develop wherever the average temperature is greater then 10 °C in the warmest month and rainfall exceeds 200 mm annually. In any area having conditions above this range there exists a variety of tree species grouped into a number of forest types that are determined by the specific conditions of the environment there, including the climate, soil, geology, and biotic activity. Forests can be broadly classified into types such as the taiga (consisting of pines, spruce, etc.), the mixed temperate forests (with both coniferous and deciduous trees), the temperate forests, the sub tropical forests, the tropical forests, and the equatorial rainforests. The **six major groups** of forest in India are moist tropical, dry tropical, montane sub tropical, montane temperate, sub alpine, and alpine. These are subdivided into 16 major types of forests.

India has a long history of traditional conservation and forest management practices. Under British rule, forest management systems were set in place mainly to exploit forests. Nonetheless, there were some attempts to conserve forests and meet the needs of local communities. The Indian National Forest Policy of 1894 provided the impetus to conserve India’s forests wealth with the prime objectives of maintaining environmental stability and meeting the basic needs of the fringe forests user-groups. Consequently, forests were classified into four broad categories, namely forests for preservation of environmental stability, forests for providing timber supplies, forests for minor forest produce, and pasture lands. While the first two categories were declared as reserve forests, the rest were designated as protected forests and managed in the interests of the local communities

Soon after independence, rapid development and progress saw large forest tracts fragmented by roads, canals, and townships. There was an increase in the exploitation of forest wealth. In 1950 the Government of India began the annual festival of tree planting called the Vanamahotsava. Gujarat was the first state to implement it. However, it was only in the 1970s that greater impetus was given to the conservation of India's forests and wildlife. India was one of the first countries in the world to have introduced a social forestry programme to introduce trees in non-forested areas along road sides, canals, and railway lines.

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**For more information on Forest link to**

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/forest/htmls/intro_def.html>  
<http://forests.org/links/Forest_Information/>  
[http://sdnp.delhi.nic.in/resources/forest/ forest-frame.html](http://sdnp.delhi.nic.in/resources/forest/%20forest-frame.html)  
[www.panda.org/forests4life/protect.cfm](http://www.panda.org/forests4life/protect.cfm)  
[www.forestsandcommunities.org/country\_Profiles/india.html](http://www.forestsand/)

Terms, definitions and explanatory notes

1. FOREST AND OTHER WOODED LAND

TERM, definition and explanatory notes

FoREST

land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with treeshigher than 5 meters and a canopy

coverof more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ. It does not

include land that is predominantly under agricultural or urban land use.

Explanatory notes

1. Forest is determined both by the presence of trees and the absence of other predominant

land uses. The trees should be able to reach a minimum height of 5 meters.

2. Includes areas with young trees that have not yet reached but which are expected to reach

a canopy cover of at least 10 percent and tree height of 5 meters or more. It also includes

areas that are temporarily unstocked due to clear-cutting as part of a forest management

practice or natural disasters, and which are expected to be regenerated within 5 years.

Local conditions may, in exceptional cases, justify that a longer time frame is used.

3. Includes forest roads, firebreaks and other small open areas; forest in national parks,

nature reserves and other protected areas such as those of specific environmental,

scientific, historical, cultural or spiritual interest.

4. Includes windbreaks, shelterbelts and corridors of trees with an area of more than 0.5 hectares

and width of more than 20 meters.

5. Includes abandoned shifting cultivation land with a regeneration of trees that have, or

are expected to reach, a canopy cover of at least 10 percent and tree height of at least

5 meters.

6. Includes areas with mangroves in tidal zones, regardless whether this area is classified

as land area or not.

7. Includes rubberwood, cork oak and Christmas tree plantations.

8. Includes areas with bamboo and palms provided that land use, height and canopy cover

criteria are met.

9. Excludestree stands in agricultural production systems, such as fruit tree plantations, oil

palm plantations, olive orchards and agroforestry systems when crops are grown under

tree cover. Note: Some agroforestry systems such as the “Taungya” system where crops

are grown only during the first years of the forest rotation should be classified as forest.