

Australian Bush Fire

August 3, 2020

What is bush fires/forest fire?

- A forest fire/ bush fire is an **unclosed freely spreading combustion**, which consumes the natural fuels of a forest that consist of duff, grass, weeds, brush and trees.
- It is a **natural disaster** and poses a threat to the forest wealth, disturbs the biodiversity and ecology of a region.
- **Natural fires** have been a disturbance of several ecosystems throughout evolution thus plants have adapted to this regime.
- Though **man-made fires** have also coexisted in equilibrium with ecosystems for centuries, the unmanaged fire caused by stakeholders, has led to **adverse consequences for the diversity and structure of forests.**
- **Incidents of forest fire in recent times:**
- El-Nino events and extensive forest fires of Australia in 2010
- Forest fires of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh in 2016
- Forest fires of Western Ghats 2015 and 2017
- California forest fire of 2018
- Scandinavian forest fire in summers of 2018
- Amazon forest fire of 2019
- Australian bush fires, 2019-2020

Australian bush fires:

- The wildfires that Australia is experiencing are a **result of man-induced global warming.**
- **More than 5.25 million hectares (13 million acres) of land has been burnt** (more than twice the area that burned in the Amazon forest fire of August 2019).
- Australia saw the hottest and driest season in 2019 with the temperature reaching almost 50 degrees celsius in

December.

- According to reports over 8,000 koalas, which is approximately 30 percent of the total population in mid-North Coast region have been lost to fire.
- Over 480 million birds, animals and reptiles have already been lost.

Causes for bush fires:

Natural Causes:

- Lightning which set trees on fire
- High atmospheric temperatures and dryness (low humidity)
- In the dry season, friction leading to sparks by rolling stones in the mountainous areas may lead to forest fires
- In bamboo areas, forest fires may occur by the rubbing together of clumps of dry bamboo.
- Volcanic eruptions
- The presence of El Nino conditions affecting the monsoon movements

Man-made causes:

- Practice of shifting cultivation
- The use of fires by villagers to ward off wild animals
- Forest fires are started by smugglers and poachers to hide the stumps of illicit felling.
- Gatherers of various forest products start small fires to obtain good grazing grass as well as to facilitate gathering of minor forest produce like flowers of *Madhuca indica*.
- Accidentally discarded cigarette butts
- Stubble burning – when these fires are not put out completely, it may spread to the adjoining forest areas.