

Changes proposed in Forest Conservation Act 1980

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In news- The Union environment ministry has come out with a consultation paper on amending the Forest Conservation Act 1980.

Key provisions-

- It proposes to **exempt certain categories of infrastructure project developers** from approaching the Centre for permission to use forest land for non-forestry purposes.
- It has proposed absolving agencies involved in national security projects, border infrastructure projects, land owned by the Railways or the Road Transport Ministry that was acquired before 1980 or when the Act came into force.
- To achieve the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) extensive plantations in all possible available lands outside the government forests (private lands) is necessary and there is a **need to release private land from the requirement of prior forest clearances.**
- A provision in the Act would be introduced to keep certain pristine forests “showcasing rich ecological values” intact for a specific period.
- The paper asks whether use of forest land for strategic and security projects of national importance should be exempted from the need to obtain prior approval from the Central government.
- The paper proposes to facilitate new technologies such as **extended reach drilling (ERD) for extraction of oil and natural gas found deep beneath the forest land** by drilling holes from outside the forest areas.
- The ministry has proposed to allow individuals whose

land fall in state specific private forests act or within the purview of 'dictionary meaning of forest', the **right to construct structures for bonafide purposes including forest protection measures and residential units up to an area of 250 sq mtr** as one time relaxation.

Previous amendments-

- The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, came into force to address deforestation.
- The Act made it necessary to get the Centre's permission for using forest land for "non forestry purposes" and the creation of an advisory committee to recommend re-classification of forests.
- FCA was **amended in 1988 and 1996.**