

UNESCO World Heritage Forests

October 29, 2021

In news— As per UNESCO's assessment on World Heritage forests, **India's Sundarbans National Park** is among five sites that have the highest blue carbon stocks globally.

Key findings of the new study-

- It is the **first ever scientific assessment of the amounts of greenhouse gases emitted from and absorbed by forests** in UNESCO World Heritage sites during 2001 and 2020.
- The assessment **involved the researchers from UNESCO, World Resources Institute (WRI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).**
- As a whole, UNESCO World Heritage forests in 257 separate sites, absorbed the equivalent of approximately 190 million tons of CO₂ from the atmosphere each year.
- However, **ten forests released more carbon than they sequestered** due to pressure from human activity and climate change, which is alarming.
- In addition to absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere **they also store substantial amounts of carbon.**
- The study described blue carbon as organic carbon that is mainly obtained from decaying plant leaves, wood, roots and animals and is captured and stored by coastal and marine ecosystems.

Factors responsible for this emission-

- According to UNESCO's findings, at some sites the **clearance of land for agriculture caused emissions to be greater than sequestration.**
- The increasing scale and severity of **wildfires**, often linked to **severe periods of drought**, was also a predominant factor in several cases.
- Other extreme weather phenomena, such as **hurricanes**

contributed at certain sites.

Fifty sites of unique marine value and Sites of India-

- UNESCO lists 50 sites across the globe for their unique marine values.
- These 50 sites have carbon stores estimated at 1.4 Gigatonne Carbon (Gt C).
- As per the UNESCO assessment, **India's Sundarbans National Park is among five sites that have the highest blue carbon stocks globally.**
- The other four sites are the **Bangladeshi portion of the Sundarbans** (110 Mt C), **Great Barrier Reef** in Australia (502 Mt C), **Everglades National Park** in the United States (400 Mt C) and the **Banc d'Arguin National Park in Mauritania** (110 Mt C).

World Heritage forests-

- As of today, more than 200 World Heritage sites harbor unique forest ecosystems.
- World Heritage forests, whose combined area of 69 million hectares is roughly twice the size of Germany, are biodiversity-rich ecosystems.