

Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves, Example, Significance

July 12, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



India's diverse ecosystems host unique species of flora and fauna, making biodiversity conservation a national priority. While protected areas like national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have long played a key role, newer categories such as Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves bridge the gap between strict protection and community participation. These reserves encourage local stewardship and ensure that ecological preservation coexists with livelihoods.

Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves

The concept of Community and Conservation Reserves was introduced through the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002, which came into effect in 2003. It added two new categories under Sections 36A to 36D of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 to strengthen participatory conservation outside traditional protected areas.

These reserves act as buffers and linkages between core habitats such as national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and human habitations. They empower local communities and private landowners to protect biodiversity voluntarily, ensuring inclusive conservation in both government and community-owned lands.

Community Reserves

A Community Reserve is an area owned by individuals or a community that is voluntarily designated for wildlife conservation, with the approval of the State Government. The key idea is to recognize the role of local communities in biodiversity protection while ensuring sustainable resource use.

Introduced under Section 36C of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, community reserves can be declared when private or community landowners agree to conserve wildlife and its habitat without losing ownership rights.

Key Features:

- Ownership remains with the community or individuals.
- Managed by a Community Reserve Management Committee (CRMC) constituted by the State Government.
- Regulated use of natural resources based on conservation plans.
- Hunting, tree felling, or habitat destruction prohibited without authorization.

Community Reserves Objectives

The major Objectives of Community Reserves has been listed below:

1. To promote participatory conservation by engaging local stakeholders.
2. To protect **biodiversity**-rich private or community lands outside government reserves.
3. To serve as ecological corridors linking protected areas.
4. To encourage sustainable livelihoods and eco-development practices.
5. To strengthen traditional conservation ethics among local people.

Community Reserves in India Examples

The Examples for Community Reserves in India include:

1. Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve, Punjab: A pioneering wetland reserve known for its biodiversity, this was the first Community Reserve in India.
2. Senchal Community Reserve, West Bengal: Located near Darjeeling, this reserve involves local communities in managing forests and wildlife.
3. Ziro Community Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh: Focused on conserving the unique agro-biodiversity of the Apatani plateau through traditional rice-fish cultivation.
4. Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary, Nagaland: Managed by the Angami tribe to protect species like the Blyth's Tragopan.
5. Boriya-Kharadi Community Reserve, Maharashtra: Established by the local panchayat to help increase the population of the Great Indian Bustard.

Community Reserves Significance

Community reserves enhance grassroots environmental governance and foster a sense of ownership among locals. They integrate conservation with local livelihoods, promoting eco-tourism, non-timber forest produce management,

and traditional knowledge systems. They are vital for meeting India's Aichi Biodiversity Targets and SDG 15 (Life on Land) commitments.

Conservation Reserves

A Conservation Reserve is an area owned by the government, particularly on marginal or buffer zones adjacent to national parks or sanctuaries, declared for the protection of wildlife and biodiversity. It is introduced under Section 36A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Conservation Reserves aim to protect corridors and landscapes connecting major protected areas, ensuring the free movement of species while involving local communities in management.

Key Features:

- Ownership lies with the government, but management is community-inclusive.
- Managed by a Conservation Reserve Management Committee (CRMC).
- Sustainable resource use allowed under guidelines.
- No change in land use permitted without State approval.

Conservation Reserves Objectives

The major Objectives of Conservation Reserves has been listed below:

1. To preserve biological corridors between core habitats.
2. To reduce man-animal conflicts near protected areas.
3. To involve local communities, NGOs, and panchayats in habitat management.
4. To protect critical ecosystems not covered under existing national parks or sanctuaries.
5. To promote eco-tourism and awareness programs.

Conservation Reserves in India Examples

The Examples for Conservation Reserves in India include:

1. Kutch Desert Wildlife Conservation Reserve, Gujarat: Acts as a buffer zone for the Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary.
2. Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve, Himachal Pradesh: India's largest conservation reserve, located in Spiti Valley.
3. Tiruppadaimarathur Conservation Reserve, Tamil Nadu: The first conservation reserve declared in the country.
4. Jawai Bandh Forests Conservation Reserve, Rajasthan: Declared by the Rajasthan government in 2012.

Conservation Reserves Significance

Conservation reserves ensure connectivity between fragmented habitats, maintain ecological balance, and support species migration and breeding. They act as transition zones balancing human activity and conservation, vital for landscape-level biodiversity planning.

Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves Need

The purpose of Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves in India have been listed below:

- To expand India's **Protected Area Network** (PAN) without displacing local populations.
- To integrate traditional ecological knowledge into modern conservation frameworks.
- To ensure ecological connectivity across fragmented landscapes.
- To support climate resilience through ecosystem-based adaptation.
- To strengthen India's commitment to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) targets.

Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves Government Initiatives

Several Government initiatives serve as a pathway to promote and support the Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves in India. Few of them are:

1. Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002: Introduced legal framework for declaring community and conservation reserves.
2. National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2014: Promotes community-led conservation as part of biodiversity governance.
3. National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-2031): Emphasizes landscape-level management and integration of local communities.
4. Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) Scheme (MoEFCC): Provides financial support for reserve creation and management.
5. Green India Mission (GIM): Encourages restoration of degraded ecosystems, including those managed as community reserves.
6. UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme: Supports community-led biodiversity projects, especially in the Northeast.

Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves Challenges

Despite several significance and benefits, Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves in India face several challenges and criticism. These challenges can be resolved by addressing them with relevant solutions, policies and initiatives as discussed below:

Challenges:

1. Limited Awareness: Many communities remain unaware of the legal and ecological benefits of forming reserves.
2. Insufficient Funding: Dependence on state funds limits effective management and monitoring.
3. Encroachment and Land Pressure: Growing population and agriculture expansion threaten reserve boundaries.
4. Institutional Weakness: Inadequate training and coordination among management committees.
5. Human-Wildlife Conflict: Expansion of reserves near human settlements sometimes increases conflict incidents.

Way Forward:

1. Capacity Building: Regular training for local committees and forest officials.
2. Community Incentives: Promote eco-tourism and payment for ecosystem services (PES).
3. Technological Monitoring: Use GIS, drones, and biodiversity mapping for better surveillance.
4. Integration with Climate Goals: Link reserves to India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) on climate change.
5. Legal Strengthening: Simplify declaration procedures and ensure adequate funding through central schemes.

Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves UPSC

As of 2023, India has 320 combined Community and Conservation Reserves across 19 states, according to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Conservation Reserves area is ~5,548.75 km² (for 115 Conservation Reserves) and Community Reserves are ~1,445-1,455 km² sum to ~7,000 km² overall area, strengthening India's network of protected areas.

These reserves not only safeguard wildlife corridors but also enhance carbon sequestration, watershed protection, and sustainable rural development. Their success exemplifies India's move toward inclusive, decentralized, and participatory conservation, aligning with global biodiversity commitments.

- As per the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) 2023 report, India has 220 Community Reserves, spread across states such as Nagaland, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala.
- The North-Eastern states lead with the highest number, reflecting strong community-based conservation traditions.
- According to the National Wildlife Database (2023) maintained by the Wildlife Institute of India, India has 100 Conservation Reserves across 18 states and union territories.
- States like Jammu & Kashmir (35 reserves), Karnataka, and Maharashtra lead in establishing such reserves.
- Together, Community and Conservation Reserves cover around ~0.21-0.22% of India's total geographic area, contributing significantly to the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP).

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/community-reserves-and-conservation-reserves/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.