

Conocarpus plants

By IASToppers | 2023-09-29 16:15:00



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The Gujarat government recently **banned** the **plantation** of **ornamental Conocarpus trees** in forest or non-forest areas, citing their **adverse impacts** on environment and human health.



[Ref- Indian Express]

About Conocarpus trees:

- It is a **fast-growing exotic mangrove species**, native to parts of **North** and **South America** and **Africa**.
- It is a popular choice for **increasing green cover**.
- It has **dark green leaves** throughout the **year** and can withstand **harsh environmental conditions** like high and low temperatures, tolerance from sandy to clayey soils, and resistance to salinity.

Adverse impacts of Conocarpus trees:

- **Health:** It flowers in **winter** and spreads **pollen** in nearby areas, causing diseases like cold, cough, asthma, allergy etc.
- **Damage to Infrastructure:** Its roots go deep inside the soil and develop extensively, damaging telecommunication lines, drainage lines, and freshwater systems.
- **Animals:** It is unpalatable for plant-eating animals (**herbivores**).

Impact of non-native trees in multiple states:

- **Gujarat and Telangana:** Banned plantation of Conocarpus.
- **Delhi:** Passed an order to clear **Vilayati Kikar** from the Central Ridge (Green lungs of Delhi) and planted native trees to suppress its growth.
- **Madras High Court, Tamil Nadu:** Interim order against non-native trees that depleted the water table in water-scarce areas.
- **Kerala:** Forest department stopped cultivation of acacia and eucalyptus in forest tracts.
- Foreign invasive plants have **reduced** the **availability** of **fodder** in **forests**, forcing **animals** to **foray** into **settlements** and farmlands.

About Vilayati Kikar:

- It is an **invasive Mexican tree species**, introduced by **Britishers** in **Delhi (1930s)**.
- It grows fast in **arid conditions**, can be used as **firewood**, and increases **green cover**.

Adverse impacts of Vilayati Kikar:

- **Roots:** Grows over **50 metres deep**, depleting **groundwater**, and its leaves contain **toxic chemicals** which prevent them from **undergoing microbial degradation**.
- **Native species:** It killed the native competition trees like acacia, dhak, kadamb, amaltas, flame-of-the-forest, etc.
- **Fauna:** birds, butterflies, leopards, porcupines and jackals almost disappeared in the area.