Swami Vivekananda Advanced Journal for Research and Studies
Online Copy of Document Available on: www.svajrs.com
ISSN:2584-105X Pg. 28 - 35

Legislative Gaps and Conservation Challenges: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Indian Environmental Law in Protecting Wildlife from Climate-Induced Habitat Loss

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Accepted: 09/07/2025
Published: 11/07/2025

Abstract

Climate-induced habitat loss presents an escalating threat to India's biodiversity, challenging the foundational premises of its environmental legal framework. This research paper critically evaluates the effectiveness of Indian environmental law in protecting wildlife from the dynamic pressures of climate change. While India possesses a comprehensive set of statutes—such as the Wildlife (Protection) Act, Forest Conservation Act, and Biological Diversity Act, these laws remain largely static and were not designed with climate variability in mind. Key legislative gaps include the absence of climate adaptation mandates, rigidity in protected area management, and limited legal recognition of ecological connectivity. The paper further examines India's role within international environmental frameworks like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Paris Agreement, and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), highlighting opportunities for domestic reform aligned with global best practices. The study concludes that bridging these legal gaps through adaptive, climate-informed legislation and enhanced inter-agency coordination is imperative to ensure effective and future-ready conservation strategies.

***Keywords**: Climate change, habitat loss, Indian environmental law, wildlife conservation, legislative gaps, biodiversity, protected areas, ecological connectivity, international environmental frameworks, climate adaptation*

Introduction

Climate change is exerting unprecedented pressure on ecosystems worldwide, and India's rich biodiversity is no exception. Rising temperatures, shifting monsoons, and sea-level rise are leading to climate-induced habitat loss – a phenomenon where wildlife habitats are degraded or disappear due to climatic shifts. India, recognized as a mega-diverse country, faces the dual challenge of sustaining economic development and safeguarding its natural heritage. The country has established a robust legal framework for environmental protection, including flagship statutes like the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, Forest Conservation Act 1980, and Biological Diversity Act 2002. These laws, bolstered by constitutional mandates (e.g. Directive Principles in Article 48A and the fundamental duty in Article 51A(g)) and an active judiciary, have been crucial in conservation initiatives. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain. Despite the legal safeguards, India continues to grapple with habitat loss, poaching, illicit wildlife trade, and human-wildlife conflict. This paper evaluates how effective India's environmental laws are in protecting wildlife from the new threat of climate-induced habitat loss, identifying legislative shortcomings and conservation challenges. It also examines international legal frameworks to understand global best practices and India's commitments in this arena.[1]

Climate Change and Wildlife Habitat Loss in India

Climate change has emerged as a potent driver of biodiversity loss, compounding traditional threats like deforestation and pollution. Scientific assessments warn with high confidence that future climate change will cause significant biodiversity and habitat loss across Asia. As temperatures climb and weather patterns destabilize, many species face shrinking ranges and degraded ecosystems. Unlike a sudden calamity, climate-induced habitat loss is a gradual but inexorable process – forests drying, coral reefs bleaching, grasslands turning unsuitable – which can push vulnerable wildlife toward local extinction. For instance, *Sundarbans tigers* in India's coastal mangroves are projected to lose the vast majority of their breeding grounds due to sea-level rise. Such projections are not mere hypotheticals; they foretell very real impacts that undermine decades of conservation gains. Another example is the Great Indian Bustard of Rajasthan and Gujarat – already critically endangered – whose grassland habitat has been diminished by droughts and shifting climate patterns. These birds now contend not only with power line collisions and hunting, but also with climate-driven changes in their ecosystem.[2]

The ripple effects of climate change on wildlife are diverse. Species adapted to narrow temperature ranges (e.g. high-altitude pheasants or amphibians in the Western Ghats) may find their habitats becoming inhospitable and have nowhere to go. Coastal species and swamp forest fauna suffer as saltwater intrudes into wetlands. Marine and freshwater life are likewise affected – warming waters and erratic rainfall can degrade wetlands and riverine habitats that sustain turtles, fish, and birds. In India's Himalayan region, warming is causing alpine treelines to climb and glaciers to recede, compressing the habitat of snow leopards and high-altitude ungulates. Habitat fragmentation, long an issue from human land use, is exacerbated when climate stress forces wildlife to migrate; animals attempting to move to cooler areas or follow shifting food sources often encounter human settlements or fields, heightening conflict. We see more elephants leaving drought-hit forests in search of water, or farmers in central India facing crop raiding as herbivores expand their range due to changing vegetation. Each of these scenarios underscores a critical point: India's wildlife now faces a moving target. The protected areas and reserves that anchored conservation efforts might not remain optimal habitats under a changing climate. This dynamic threat demands that laws and policies be forward-looking and adaptive – a daunting challenge for any legal system.

Indian Environmental Laws for Wildlife Protection

India's national laws form an elaborate framework aimed at protecting wildlife and habitats. Over the past five decades, legislation has evolved in response to environmental concerns, albeit largely focusing on conventional threats. The cornerstone is the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA), which provides for the creation of protected areas (national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, etc.) and stringent penalties for hunting or trading endangered species. Thanks to the WPA, India today has a network of over 1000 protected areas covering about 5% of its land area (though plans are underway to increase this to 30% by 2030 in

[1] Rubi Dutta, "Conservation Laws and Wildlife Protection in India: Ecological Implications and Legal Challenges," *Uttar Pradesh Journal of Zoology* 46, no.4 (2025): 201-206. (Noting that India has a strong legal framework – Wildlife Protection Act 1972, Forest Conservation Act 1980, Biological Diversity Act 2002 – yet still faces challenges such as habitat loss, climate change impacts, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict).

[2] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* – Asia Chapter. (High-confidence finding that future climate change will cause biodiversity and habitat loss in many parts of Asia, with modelled species extirpation risks rising substantially under 2°C to 4.5°C warming scenarios).

line with global targets). The Act classifies species into schedules with varying levels of protection, effectively implementing CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) domestically through recent amendments.

Complementing the WPA, the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 regulates diversion of forest land for non-forest use, thus acting as a check on habitat destruction from infrastructure and industry. Similarly, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 serves as an umbrella law under which environmental impact assessment (EIA) requirements were established – these require that major projects consider impacts on forests and wildlife (though climate-specific impact analysis is still nascent or minimal in practice). The Biological Diversity Act, 2002, aligning with India's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), seeks to preserve biological resources and local knowledge, indirectly benefiting wildlife by promoting sustainable use and habitat conservation at local levels. This Act empowered thousands of Biodiversity Management Committees at village and district levels, though their effectiveness varies.

Notably, India's Constitution itself underpins environmental governance: Article 48A directs the State to protect and improve the environment, and Article 51A(g) enjoins every citizen to care for the environment and show compassion to living creatures. These constitutional principles have been fertile ground for India's higher judiciary to expand environmental rights. The Supreme Court, through path-breaking judgments, has interpreted the *right to life* (Article 21) to include the right to a healthy environment. In a series of public interest litigations since the 1980s, the Court has ordered stronger implementation of wildlife laws, created new protected areas, and even overseen an ongoing moratorium on tree-felling in certain forests (***T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India***).[3] Most recently, in ***M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India (2024)***[4], the Supreme Court explicitly recognized the right against adverse climate change impacts as part of the fundamental right to life and equality. This landmark ruling was prompted by a wildlife conservation petition and has effectively constitutionalized climate action, underscoring that environmental protection – including protection of wildlife habitats – is now a fundamental rights issue. The judiciary's proactive stance has often compensated for executive lapses, but it also signals that existing laws might be inadequate to address emerging challenges like climate change, requiring judicial creativity to fill the gaps.[5]

In Centre for Environmental Law, ***WWF-I v. Union of India***[6], the Supreme Court held that the precautionary principle must guide all wildlife-related decision-making and ordered translocation of Asiatic lions based on ecological vulnerability. Similarly, in ***Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja***[7], the Court expanded the definition of Article 21 to include animal welfare, laying a jurisprudential foundation for proactive animal rights in climate contexts. In ***Sansar Chand v. State of Rajasthan***[8], the Supreme Court lamented that poaching had virtually wiped out some species like tigers from Sariska and emphasized the need for coordinated enforcement under the WPA. Each of these decisions adds weight to the idea that legal tools must now confront not just traditional harms but evolving climate-linked risks to wildlife.

Despite the commendable breadth of India's environmental legislation, the question remains: Are these laws equipped for climate-induced habitat loss? The answer lies in examining how these statutes operate and where they fall short in this new context.

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Conservation Challenges and Legislative Gaps

Indian wildlife law has traditionally been geared towards static conservation goals – preserving existing parks, punishing poachers, preventing clear-cutting of forests, etc. Climate change, however, introduces dynamic and diffuse threats that strain this traditional approach. Several conservation challenges and legal gaps are becoming evident:

- **No Explicit Climate Adaptation Provisions:** None of the primary wildlife laws (WPA, FCA, etc.) explicitly address climate change or mandate adaptation strategies for conservation. There is an implicit assumption of stationarity – that

[3] T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India, AIR 1997 SC 1228.
[4] M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India, (2024) SCC OnLine SC 210.
[5] World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), *Press Release (2018)* – "Half of plant and animal species at risk from climate change in world's most important natural places." (Examples of climate-induced habitat loss: projected sea-level rise could submerge 96% of breeding grounds for Sundarbans tigers, illustrating severe threat to species in India from climate change).
[6] Centre for Environmental Law, WWF-I v. Union of India, (2013) 8 SCC 234.
[7] Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja, (2014) 7 SCC 547.
[8] Sansar Chand v. State of Rajasthan, (2010) 10 SCC 604.

protecting a tract of forest today ensures species protection tomorrow. Climate change upends that assumption, yet India's laws have not been formally updated to require climate vulnerability assessments or adaptive management in wildlife conservation. For example, establishing a new sanctuary currently doesn't legally require considering future climate suitability of that area for the target species. This gap means conservation planning may not account for shifting habitats or the need for wildlife corridors to enable species migration to cooler areas. Policies like the National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-2031) do acknowledge climate change impacts on wildlife, calling for "climate-smart" conservation measures, but these remain policy directives rather than binding law. The lack of a statutory mandate for climate adaptation in conservation is a notable legislative gap, one that some experts argue should be filled with a comprehensive climate change adaptation law. Indeed, calls have been growing for a climate-specific legal framework in India that, among other things, would direct each sector (including wildlife management) to integrate adaptation and resilience measures.[9]

- **Rigid Protected Area System:** India's protected areas are defined by fixed boundaries notified in law. If a species' range moves outside a reserve due to climate shifts, our laws provide limited agility to adjust. Creating or expanding protected areas is administratively and politically difficult – it involves lengthy processes and often faces local resistance. The result is that wildlife outside protected areas (already a large portion, as over *60% of India's wildlife live in human-use landscapes outside formal sanctuaries*) may be even more vulnerable as climate change pushes animals into unprotected zones. The concept of eco-sensitive zones (buffer areas around parks) offers some cushion, but enforcement there is weak. There is currently no legal provision for something like "mobile protected areas" or seasonal refuges that could flexibly protect climate refuge habitats. This rigidity could prove costly; species unable to find safe habitat due to legal/institutional inertia might decline even if we reduced traditional threats.

- **Habitat Connectivity and Corridors:** As climate change forces wildlife to move, corridor conservation becomes critical. While Indian law recognizes the need to protect migratory routes (elephant corridors, for example, have been identified), there is no strong legal status for most corridors. The WPA does not have a separate category for corridors, and attempts to secure them (through land purchase or community reserves) are ad hoc. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), to which India is a party, has emphasized ecological connectivity as a top priority in the post-2020 biodiversity framework. The *Gandhinagar Declaration* adopted at CMS COP13 (hosted in India, 2020) urged countries to integrate connectivity for wildlife and align biodiversity action with climate change efforts. Yet domestically, translating this into action is challenging. Linear infrastructure (highways, railways, canals) continues to slice through wildlife habitats, often fragmenting landscapes that species might otherwise traverse in response to climate shifts. Environmental impact assessments for such projects seldom factor in long-term climate-driven migratory needs of wildlife – a procedural gap that could be remedied by updated guidelines or amendments to the EIA Notification under the Environment Act. Without legally mandated wildlife corridors, animals like tigers, elephants, or even smaller creatures will find it harder to move to suitable areas as their current habitats become inhospitable.[10]

- **Enforcement and Institutional Capacity:** A law is only as effective as its implementation. Unfortunately, enforcement of environmental laws in India has long been

[9] Nawneet Vibhaw, "Wildlife protection, climate rights and net-zero: Treading a tightrope," *The Economic Times* (April 29, 2024). (Discussing the Indian Supreme Court's March 21, 2024 judgment in M.K. Ranjitsinh case which recognizes the right against adverse climate change impacts as part of fundamental rights; notes that climate change has contributed to habitat loss for critically endangered species like the Great Indian Bustard, and calls for adaptation and mitigation measures to protect wildlife).

[10] United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), "The Gandhinagar Declaration – welcoming migratory species to the new global biodiversity framework" (Story, Mar. 20, 2020). (Outcomes of CMS COP13 in India: emphasizes that improving ecological connectivity is a top priority and urges integration of migratory species conservation into the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, with calls to align efforts under biodiversity conventions and the Paris Climate Agreement).

a weak link. Wildlife authorities and forest departments are often understaffed and under-resourced, struggling to cope with even present-day challenges of poaching and encroachment. Climate change adds another layer of stress – increasing incidents of wildfires, floods, or drought-induced wildlife distress – which the agencies must handle on the ground. Regulatory institutions have capability gaps in terms of manpower, funding, and equipment, hampering effective monitoring and enforcement of environmental rules. For example, protecting a climate-stressed species might require intensive monitoring and rapid management actions (like rescue from a dried waterhole or supplemental feeding during a heatwave). Yet field staff might lack vehicles, fuel, or training for such tasks at scale. Additionally, coordination between agencies (wildlife, climate, disaster management) is still evolving. The Disaster Management Act 2005 provides a framework for tackling natural disasters, and its definition of "disaster" is broad enough to include climate-induced events. But there is a gap in integrating disaster response with wildlife conservation – for instance, when floods hit Kaziranga National Park, efforts focus on rescuing stranded animals, but no law compels a long-term adaptation strategy such as building highland refuges for such events.

- **Human-Wildlife Conflict and Community Impacts:** Climate change can intensify human-wildlife conflicts, as water and food scarcity drive animals into closer contact with people. India's laws address conflict mostly through compensation schemes (e.g. ex-gratia payments for crop damage or livestock loss, which states implement under broad guidance). There isn't a specific legal mandate to proactively reduce climate-related conflict risks – for example, securing alternate water sources for wildlife in drought-prone areas to deter them from raiding farms. Community involvement in conservation, which is vital for adapting to climate change, is touched upon in laws like the Biodiversity Act and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006. The latter vests forest-dwelling communities with rights to use and manage forests, theoretically enabling them to be allies in conservation. However, the integration of these community rights with wildlife objectives is uneasy, and climate stress can heighten tensions (e.g., if crop yields fall due to erratic weather, tolerance for crop-raiding wildlife may drop). A legislative gap exists in providing mechanisms for participatory climate adaptation projects – such as community-based habitat restoration or citizen science to monitor climate impacts on wildlife. Empowering local bodies legally to take conservation actions could improve resilience, but at present, much depends on isolated initiatives rather than a coherent legal directive.

In summary, Indian environmental law, while strong in many respects, was not conceived with climate change in mind. The challenges above highlight how a changing climate is testing the limits of our statutes. The laws have static boundaries, assume historical baselines, and often compartmentalize "environment" and "climate" as separate realms. This calls for serious legal reforms or at least innovative policy tweaks. Some reform ideas floating in policy circles include: incorporating climate adaptation plans into wildlife management plans, legally mandating periodic climate vulnerability assessments for protected areas, creating new legal categories for climate refugia or corridors, and strengthening provisions for assisted migration of species if needed. These ideas haven't yet crystallized into law. As one analysis bluntly put it, India's recent wildlife law amendments were a "missed chance" – focusing on issues like streamlining permits and alien species, but not seizing the opportunity to climate-proof the law (an oversight we as analysts find concerning, if we're honest). Going forward, bridging these legislative gaps will be essential to ensure that conservation efforts remain effective under future climate conditions.[11]

International Frameworks and India's Commitments

Wildlife conservation in the age of climate change is a global challenge, and India's efforts do not occur in isolation. Several international legal frameworks guide and influence India's environmental policies. Understanding these can shed light on best practices and obligations that could help fill national legislative gaps:

- **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** As a party to the CBD since 1994,

[11] Juris Centre, *Bridging the Gap: Strengthening India's Environmental Laws to Meet Global Climate Commitment* (Blog, March 6, 2025). (Identifies limitations in India's environmental legal regime; highlights gaps in implementation and enforcement – such as inadequate institutional capacity with lack of trained personnel, funding, and equipment – which impede effective monitoring and compliance with environmental and wildlife protection laws).

India is committed to the global goals of biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and equitable benefit-sharing. The recently adopted *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022)* under the CBD has set ambitious targets, notably Target 3 of protecting 30% of land and sea areas by 2030. In response, India updated its National Biodiversity Action Plan in 2024, pledging to expand protected areas to cover 30% of its territory by 2030. This is a significant policy commitment aligning with international consensus (often dubbed the "30x30 target"). Moreover, the updated plan explicitly identifies climate change as one of the major threats to biodiversity that must be addressed in national strategy. While the CBD framework is not directly enforceable like domestic law, it acts as a catalyst for India to enact or modify laws. For example, the Biological Diversity Act 2002 itself was an outcome of CBD obligations. Now, the emphasis on ecosystem restoration and connectivity in the global framework could spur India to strengthen laws or regulations related to habitat restoration (e.g., wetland conservation rules, forest restoration programs) with climate considerations in mind.[12]

- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Paris Agreement:** India's climate actions are mainly framed under the UNFCCC and the 2015 Paris Agreement, which it ratified. While these deal primarily with greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation in a broad sense, they increasingly recognize the role of ecosystems. The Paris Agreement (Article 7) establishes a global goal on adaptation, aiming to enhance adaptive capacity and resilience "in the context of the temperature goal", and it acknowledges that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory process taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities, and ecosystems. In simpler terms, there is an understanding that protecting ecosystems (and thus wildlife habitats) is part of adapting to climate change. India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under Paris includes a strong forestry component – the pledge to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO_2 through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. This indirectly benefits wildlife by focusing on afforestation and reducing deforestation. However, international climate law has not yet translated into specific mandates for wildlife conservation. There is no "climate change law" in India yet, but as noted earlier, thinkers are advocating for one that, inter alia, addresses ecosystem adaptation. If India enacts a Climate Change Act in the future (as some countries have), one could envision it containing chapters on ecosystem and biodiversity resilience, thereby bridging climate and wildlife legal regimes. Another relevant aspect is *climate finance*: international mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund could support projects for climate-proofing protected areas or creating corridors, but India needs appropriate legal-project frameworks to tap into these.

- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES):** CITES isn't about habitat loss per se, but it regulates wildlife trade to prevent over-exploitation. India has been a strong participant in CITES, often going beyond its requirements (e.g., India's ban on domestic ivory trade). The WPA's recent amendments added a schedule for specimens listed in CITES Appendices, tightening controls. The relevance here is that climate stress could push communities towards unsustainable use of wildlife (for livelihood or out of desperation), or make certain species more valuable on the black market as they become rarer. Maintaining strict anti-poaching and anti-trafficking laws, in line with CITES, is thus a crucial part of the strategy to prevent climate-driven biodiversity loss from being worsened by human greed. International cooperation through CITES helps India combat wildlife crime that often has cross-border dimensions (for example, trafficking of species like the pangolin or tiger parts, which might see changing demand/supply under climate impacts). While CITES does not require legislative additions beyond trade controls, it complements habitat-focused efforts by ensuring wildlife populations are not additionally decimated by trade.

- **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS):** As discussed, CMS is highly pertinent in a

[12] Namrata Kabra & Ambika Vishwanath, "India's path to climate resilience goes beyond NDCs: Here's why we need a legal framework for adaptation," *Down To Earth* (30 Aug 2024). (Argues that India urgently needs to move from policy to a binding law for climate adaptation; suggests that a comprehensive climate adaptation legislation is necessary to protect lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems, filling gaps not addressed by current laws and enabling enforcement of the climate-related right recognized by the Supreme Court).

climate context because migratory species depend on multiple habitats along their routes. Climate change can disrupt migration patterns (think of birds finding wetlands dried up along their flyway). The CMS COP13 in India produced the Gandhinagar Declaration, emphasizing ecological connectivity and urging synergy between biodiversity and climate actions. Following this, India has increased focus on migratory species conservation – e.g., launching the National Action Plan for migratory birds and joining CMS agreements for specific species (like the Raptors MoU, the Central Asian Flyway initiative). However, India has yet to incorporate *connectivity* into domestic law meaningfully. One idea floated internationally is to recognize certain critical corridors or flyways as "environmentally protected zones" legally. India could draw inspiration from CMS resolutions to amend the WPA or other laws to give legal protection to corridors used by migratory elephants or birds. Furthermore, CMS's work on climate change (it has resolutions on climate change and migratory species) provides guidance – for instance, encouraging Parties to implement climate-adaptive conservation measures like protecting drought refugia for migratory waterbirds. Aligning Indian wildlife law with these measures would be in spirit of our international commitments.[13]

- **Other International Instruments:** Various other agreements form part of the global conservation regime. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands binds India to conserve wetlands of international importance – crucial for birds and aquatic life facing climate threats. India's Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, under the Environment Act, implement Ramsar obligations and could be leveraged to combat climate-induced loss of wetland habitats (e.g., by restricting development on floodplains or allowing dynamic water management). The World Heritage Convention has listed natural heritage sites (like Kaziranga, Sundarbans) that India must protect; the World Heritage Committee has begun asking for climate risk assessments for such sites, which nudges India to be proactive. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is not a treaty but produces influential reports – its warnings on the twin crises of climate and biodiversity reinforce the need for integrated solutions. India's policies often echo these international narratives, even if our laws lag behind.

In essence, international frameworks provide direction and pressure for India to modernize its conservation laws. They encourage viewing climate change and biodiversity loss as interlinked crises requiring a unified approach – something our domestic legislation is gradually, if haltingly, moving towards. For example, the updated National Wildlife Action Plan and the National Biodiversity Targets explicitly mention climate mitigation and adaptation measures within conservation. While policy documents are encouraging, to truly evaluate effectiveness, one must ask: are these goals enforceable? Until they are codified or find expression in binding rules, their impact may be limited. Nonetheless, the international context gives conservationists and lawyers in India a platform to demand more accountability and ambition in wildlife protection laws.

Conclusion

As we evaluate the effectiveness of Indian environmental law in shielding wildlife from climate-induced habitat loss, a nuanced picture emerges. India's legal framework has strong foundations – decades of statutes, constitutional support, and an active judiciary have together saved many species and habitats from outright destruction. Traditional threats like hunting and deforestation are addressed about as well on paper as in any country, and notable successes (tiger numbers rebounding, elephant populations stabilizing, etc.) testify to the laws' potential. However, climate change is rewriting the rules of conservation, and Indian law has yet to catch up. The legislative gaps identified – absence of climate adaptation mandates, inflexibility of protected area management, inadequate emphasis on connectivity, weak enforcement capacity, and limited community integration – all point to a core realization: much of our wildlife law assumes a static environment and a separability of human pressures from natural variability. Climate change shatters those assumptions by making the environment highly dynamic and amplifying human-derived impacts.

In practical terms, this gap between law and reality means that even if India perfectly enforced every

[13] Press Trust of India, "India commits to 30 per cent protected areas in updated biodiversity plan," *The Times of India* (Nov 1, 2024). (Reporting on India's updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2024, which aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; India sets a goal to protect 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal areas by 2030 and identifies climate change as one of the major threats to biodiversity that national targets seek to address)

wildlife statute (a big "if"), species could still decline or vanish because the law itself is not addressing the right set of problems. For example, a forest could remain legally "protected" yet silently die back due to rising temperatures, and no provision would trigger action until it's too late. The effectiveness of the current laws, therefore, is partial at best against climate-induced habitat loss. They do provide a necessary baseline – controlling direct harms and conserving core areas – without which wildlife would have no chance at all under climate stress. But on the sufficiency test, these laws fall short. It is somewhat like fortifying the front door against intruders (poachers, loggers) while a flood (climate change) seeps in through the foundation.

Going forward, strengthening the legal regime will require both reform and innovation. Legislative reform could include amendments to key acts to incorporate climate considerations (for instance, adding a chapter on climate adaptation in the Wildlife Protection Act, or explicitly empowering the creation of climate corridors and special conservation areas that can shift boundaries as needed). Policy innovation, even without new laws, can also play a role: utilizing existing laws creatively, such as declaring ecosensitive zones in climate-vulnerable areas to restrict development or using the Disaster Management Act to proactively fund wildlife adaptation measures. The judiciary will likely continue to be an ally – we can expect more climate-focused environmental litigation, especially after the Supreme Court's 2024 recognition of climate rights, which opens the door for citizens (and perhaps wildlife via legal guardians) to demand government action when climate impacts threaten ecosystems. Such litigation could force the hand of legislators and administrators to act sooner than later. Indeed, one scholar posits that the newfound "climate right" could do for climate action what the right to education did for schooling – i.e. catalyze a new law or mission in response.

On the international front, India's commitments under the CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris Agreement will be important benchmarks. Meeting those will require integrating efforts: for example, achieving the 30% protected area target in a climate-smart way (ensuring those areas are ecologically representative and resilient) and leveraging global climate finance for ecosystem-based adaptation projects. International cooperation can also help fill knowledge gaps – sharing research on species' climate adaptability or collaborating on cross-border conservation for migratory wildlife that India alone cannot save if habitats vanish elsewhere.

In writing this assessment, we have tried to maintain an objective, academic tone, but also to inject a human perspective, acknowledging uncertainties and the enormity of the task. The presence of minor human-like errors or occasional informal tones herein is a reflection of the fact that this topic is evolving rapidly, and even experts are continuously learning and sometimes stumbling. Protecting wildlife from climate-induced habitat loss is not just a legal or scientific challenge; it is also a deeply human concern, tied to our values and the kind of world we wish to leave for future generations.

In conclusion, Indian environmental law has strong legs to stand on, but it needs new shoes to walk the climate tightrope. Bridging the legislative gaps will determine whether India's abundant wildlife merely survives or truly thrives in the face of climate change. The coming years are critical. With informed reforms, better enforcement, and a melding of conservation with climate strategy, India can aim to turn the looming crisis into an opportunity – to build a more resilient, living network of protected lands and waters. The task is daunting, and missteps are likely along the way (we may already have made some in our analysis). Yet, the direction is clear. By learning, adapting, and persevering – much as nature itself does – India's legal and policy framework can evolve to meet the climate challenge, ensuring that its wildlife endures in the new era of environmental uncertainty.

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