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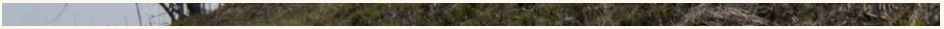
Community Reserves: Locally Governed, Not State-Governed

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Community Reserves: Locally Governed, Not State-Governed

A community reserve is a legal wildlife area on volunteered private or community land. The State declares it. A local committee manages it. **UPSC tested this in 2023.**





Forest near Darjeeling, West Bengal. Senchal is a Wildlife Sanctuary, not a community reserve. Photo by Alexkom000, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

At a Glance

Four facts to hold on to.

01
Law

Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Sections 36C and 36D.

02
Added

By the 2002 amendment.

03
Land

Volunteered private or community land.

04
Run by

A local management committee.

Notification A formal State notice declaring an area.
Title Legal ownership of land.
NTFP Non-timber forest produce, like honey and leaves.
Honorary warden The committee chair, a local role.

Start with the Land

Must Know

Four protected-area types

- The Act lists national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, conservation reserves and community reserves.
- The 2002 amendment added the last two. They took effect in 2003.
- **Section 36C** covers private or community land outside the other three types.
- A family or community may volunteer land.
- The State may then **notify** it as a community reserve.
- Caring for a forest does not create the category. The notice does.
- Source: India Code, Section 36C.

Who owns the land?

- Ownership and management are different.
- A notice does not hand title to the State. The owners still own the land.
- A new land-use pattern needs a committee resolution and State approval.

> **Quick check 1.** A Community Reserve makes the State's Chief Wildlife Warden its governing authority. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Who Manages It, and What Is Allowed

Good to Know

The management committee

- Section 36D tells the State to form a committee.

- The committee conserves and manages the reserve and writes its plan.
- On community land, the Village Panchayat nominates at least five local representatives. A State forest or wildlife representative also sits on it.
- On private land, the owner joins the committee, with a State representative and a local Panchayat or tribal representative.
- Members choose a chair. The chair becomes the honorary wildlife warden.
- This differs from a conservation reserve committee, which only advises the Chief Wildlife Warden.
- Source: India Code, Sections 36B–36D.

What people may do

- Hunting wildlife is prohibited.
- Non-timber forest produce collection may continue where law and the local plan allow.
- Traditional farming is not automatically permitted.
- A reserve label does not erase every existing right by itself.

> **Quick check 2.** Community Reserves were introduced under Section 36C by the 2002 amendment to the Wild Life (Protection) Act. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Edge

Previous Year Questions

UPSC 2023 tested community reserves.

> **Quick check 3.** In UPSC 2023, both the hunting ban and non-timber produce collection statements were marked correct. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

> **Quick check 4.** Traditional agricultural practices are automatically permitted once an area becomes a Community Reserve. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Compare, Case Studies and Dated Facts

Great to Know

Four areas compared

Area	Land and legal route	Who leads	Key point
Community reserve	Volunteered private or community land; notice under 36C	Local committee (36D) with State role	Title stays with owners; land-use change needs two approvals
Conservation reserve	Government land; Section 36A	Chief Wildlife Warden, advised by a committee	Cannot declare private land
Wildlife sanctuary	State process, Sections 18–26A	Chief Wildlife Warden and State staff	Some access may continue under permits
National park	State process, Section 35	Chief Wildlife Warden and State staff	Strictest limits; grazing barred

Read more in India's Conservation Framework.

Siswan, Punjab

- Siswan Community Reserve lies in Punjab's Shivalik foothills near a dam.
- A 2017 Wildlife Institute of India study recorded villagers' worries about new limits without enough discussion.
- The later management plan stressed community participation and other livelihoods.
- Sources: WII, Siswan plan and WII, 2017 assessment.

Khonoma, Nagaland

- The Angami community began a village-led sanctuary in 1998.

- It helped protect the Blyth's tragopan.
- A community-led sanctuary is not automatically a notified 36C reserve.
- Source: Nagaland Tourism.

A dated count

- The Wildlife Institute of India counted 219 community reserves in its 2021–22 report.
- That number is dated. It is not today's total.
- Source: WII annual report 2021–22.

> **Think it through: why can a community-reserve label cause conflict even when it protects wildlife?**
>
> Some users may lose access or income, while others gain from visits or forest goods. A weak consultation can hide these unequal effects. Sharing the plan in plain words and mapping existing uses early helps prevent disputes.

> **Quick check 5.** The Wildlife Institute of India reported 219 Community Reserves in its 2021–22 annual report. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

> **Quick check 6.** The Khonoma sanctuary in Nagaland is managed by the Angami community. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 7. A Community Reserve can include private or community-owned land, unlike a National Park. *(True or False?)*

See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

Which section?

36C.

Added when?

2002 amendment.

Who manages?

Local committee, 36D.

Is hunting allowed?

No.

Does title pass to State?

No.

🎲 Practice: Community Reserves: Locally Governed, Not State-Governed

2 verified questions from this topic.

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1. Once the Central Government notifies an area as a Community Reserve:
1. the Chief Wildlife Warden of the State becomes the governing authority of such forest
2. hunting is not allowed in such area
3. people of such area are allowed to collect non-timber forest produce
4. people of such area are allowed traditional agricultural practices.

How many of the above statements are correct?

A. Only one

B. Only two

C. Only three

D. All four

See answer ↓

2. Unlike a National Park, a Community Reserve can legally include which of the following?

A. Only land already inside an existing Tiger Reserve

B. Private or community-owned land

C. Only marine or coastal government land

D. Only Central Government-owned forest land

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** Only statements 2 and 3 are correct. The question says the Central Government notifies the reserve, but under Section 36C of the Wild Life (Protection) Act the State Government declares it. A Community Reserve Management Committee runs the reserve, not the Chief Wildlife Warden. Traditional agriculture is not automatically allowed. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** A Community Reserve can include private or community land, which a National Park cannot — part of why local management, not the Chief Wildlife Warden, governs it. ↑ Q2

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **False.** ↑ 4
5. **True.** ↑ 5
6. **True.** ↑ 6
7. **True.** ↑ 7

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