

BIOLOGY WEEK EIGHT AND NINE

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Meaning of conservation

Conservation is the diligent and wise use of the earth's resources to achieve the highest quality of living for all mankind on a sustainable basis.

Meaning of natural resources

Natural resources simply mean the endowments of nature from which man satisfies his basic needs. Conservation of natural resources can, therefore, be referred to as "the controlled exploitation and diligent use of available natural resources in such a way as to sustain their availability".

It is the preservation of the amount of nature of the environment. Through rational use and skilful management, natural environment and its resources can be improved, maintained and protected for the benefit of mankind.

Natural resources can be classified as:

Natural abiotic resources which are non-living or non-replaceable. E.g. ores and materials extracted from the ground.

Natural biotic resources which are living or replaceable e.g. wildlife, forest, water, air, sunlight etc.

Natural resources that need to be conserved are:

- Natural forest
- Animal/wildlife
- Water
- Soil
- Air
- Mineral resources

The importance of conservation of natural resources

There is an urgent need for the effective conservation of natural resources if mankind is to get maximum and lasting benefit from nature. The following reasons are why we conserve natural resources:

1. The natural forest is getting depleted through overlogging and overgrazing.
2. Risk of extinction of indigenous wildlife and fish species through uncontrolled hunting and fishing.
3. Rapid soil degradation through poor land use and obsolete agricultural practices.
4. Pollution of surface and groundwater resources through indiscriminate disposal of all kinds of wastes.
5. Desert encroachment.

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6. Bad mining practice.
7. High population growth.

Resources that need to be conserved are:

1. Non-renewable resources like fossil fuels (crude oil), minerals.
2. Renewable resources like water, wildlife, forest.

Ways of ensuring the conservation of natural resources

The responsibility of the conservation of natural resources should be the collective effort of both government and individuals.

These efforts should include the following:

1. **Government agencies:** The primary task of these bodies is to see to the protection and conservation of specific areas of concern. Examples are the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Forest Reserve Authority, Conservation Foundations, etc.
2. **Legislation:** These are usually law and treaties put in place by National and international governments and organization to protect the undue exploitation of endangered species and other forms of resources. Examples are Anti-whaling law, the prohibition of bush burning and tree felling and law against gas flaring.
3. **Conservation Education:** This effort aims at bringing awareness and public enlightenment to the general public on the essence of conservation.
4. **Erection of parks and reserves:** This strategy involves the identifying of unique areas and setting them aside for the protection and conservation of plants and animals. E.g. Yankari, Kainji, Olokemeji forest.

Problems militating against efforts at conserving natural resources

1. Overpopulation which leads to an increasing demand on limited resources thereby causing undue exploitation of resources.
2. Inadequate awareness is due in part to the failure of governments in conservation education and ineffective public awareness campaign.
3. Poor funding resulting in the poor or non-implementation of government policies and programmes on conservation.
4. Limited land for the establishment and maintenance of games and forest reserves and other related conservation projects.

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The benefits of conservation

1. Improvement of the quality of human life in a clean and healthy environment.
2. Preservation of the beauty of the natural environment of scenery such as lakes, waterfalls, mountains etc.
3. Boost of tourism to national parks and reserves.
4. Great scientific benefits as living organisms are studied in their natural habitats.
5. Protection of rare and/or endangered species of organisms.
6. Prevention and control of erosion and desert encroachment.
7. Prevention of exploitation of mineral resources.
8. Increased revenue for government and individuals.