

World Wetlands Day 2020 – ‘Wetlands and Biodiversity’

Information Note

1. Water is life, and wetlands are the life support systems that ensure functioning of water cycle. India is endowed by a rich diversity of wetlands ranging from high altitude wetlands of Himalayas, floodplains of mighty rivers as Ganges and Brahmaputra, lagoons and mangrove marshes on the coastline and reefs in the marine environments. Wetlands are rich reservoirs of biodiversity:
 - **40%** of the world’s plant and animal species live or breed in wetlands
 - Over **100,000 freshwater species** have been identified in wetlands so far
 - **Coastal wetlands**, especially, are among the most biologically diverse places

As per National Wetland Atlas, nearly 4.7% of India’s geographical area is under wetlands.

2. Wetlands are vital for our water and food security. As ‘kidneys of landscape’, wetlands receive flows of water and waste from upstream sources. They help stabilize water supplies, cleanse polluted waters, protect shorelines, and recharge groundwater aquifers. The extensive food chain and biological diversity in wetlands make them ‘biological supermarkets’. Wetlands are valuable as sources, sink and transformers of a multitude of biological, chemical and genetic material. In addition, wetlands have special attributes as cultural heritage of humanity, and have deep connections with our beliefs and practices. They are indeed an important part of our natural wealth and “liquid assets”.
3. The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The Convention was adopted in 1971 at the Iranian City of Ramsar. Contracting Parties to the Convention commit to designating wetlands into the List of Wetlands of International Importance (as per 8 criteria set by the Convention), and wise use of all wetlands in their territory. As on date, the Convention has 170 Contracting Parties, who have designated 2,339 Ramsar Sites covering an area more than 252 million hectare, making it one of the world’s largest protected area network. India became a party to the Convention in 1982, and as on date has designated 27 wetlands as Ramsar Sites under the 9 designation criteria of the Convention.

4. The 'wise use' approach of Ramsar Convention is globally recognized. Notably, the wise use approach was coined in 1972, much before the hallmark 1992 Rio Conference wherein the term sustainable development was rendered a definition. As endorsed by Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention, wise use of wetlands is "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development". The wise use approach recognizes that stemming wetland loss and degradation requires incorporation of linkages between people and wetlands, and thereby emphasizes that human use of these ecosystems on sustainable basis is compatible with conservation.
5. 2nd February of each year is celebrated as World Wetlands Day to mark the date of adoption of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The Convention is the only multilateral environmental agreement to date for conservation and wise use of wetlands. The World Wetland Day is being organized to raise awareness on the values wetlands have for nature and society. Each year, the World Wetlands Day is attached to a specific theme. The 2020 theme '**Wetlands and Biodiversity**' has been chosen to initiate actions against the losing plant biodiversity of wetlands.
6. Wetlands are valuable as sources, sink and transformers of a multitude of biological, chemical and genetic material. Wetlands play an important role in reducing the impact of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and cyclones. Wetlands act as a natural sponge, absorbing and storing excess rainfall and reducing flooding. During the dry season, they release the water stored, delaying the onset of droughts and reducing water shortages.
7. Humans are destroying wetlands. Wetlands are vanishing three times faster than forests. 35% of wetlands have disappeared since the 1970s. 87% have been lost since the 1700s. Causes of wetland loss are drainage and infilling for agriculture and construction, pollution, overexploitation of resources (e.g., overfishing), invasive species and climate change.
8. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, as the nodal Ministry for wetlands conservation have been assisting State Governments since 1985 in design and implementation of integrated management plans. Financial assistance has been provided to State Governments for implementation of management plans for 180 wetlands. In 2017, the Ministry has also notified the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules as the regulatory framework for wetlands in the country.

Several states have also notified wetland authorities and acts and rules for conservation and wise-use of wetlands.

9. Biodiversity is in steep decline. Wetland species are declining most:
 - **One million** animal and plant species are threatened with extinction
 - **Species are declining** faster than at any time in human history and the pace is accelerating
 - **Climate change** is making it worse
 - Citizens, NGOs, and governments are working to **reverse the trends**. But we are not doing enough

10. Under the capacity building programme of National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-system (NPCA) scheme, regional workshops, training programs are organized for imparting training to the wetland managers involved in the conservation and management of wetlands and lakes in the country. World Wetlands Day is observed on 2nd February each year to raise awareness among all sections of the society about values and functions of wetlands and wise-use of their resources.

11. The following actions are recommended for conserving wetlands and thereby ensuring wetlands are there rich with biodiversity:
 - Restore, conserve and promote **wise use** of all wetlands
 - Don't drain
 - Don't build over
 - Don't degrade
 - Assess the real **value** of wetlands
 - Organize an event to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands biodiversity
 - Register and upload your event to worldwetlandsday.org
 - Learn about the types of wetlands in your country
 - Assess the real value of wetlands. Use a diagnostic approach to identify root causes of wetlands degradation, and ensure that the management plan is adequate to respond to the risks.
 - Monitor wetland ecosystem health periodically.
 - Disseminate information on Wetlands and Biodiversity to all stakeholders, and seek their views on adaptation needs.
