



## World Wetlands Day and Two New Ramsar Sites

**For Prelims:** Wetlands Day, Wetlands in India, Ramsar Sites.

**For Mains:** Significance of Wetlands and related threats.

### Why in News?

Recently, World [Wetlands Day](#) was celebrated on the **2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2022** across the globe.

- On the occasion, "**National Wetland Decadal Change Atlas**" was prepared by the **Space Applications Center** (SAC - one of the major centers of [ISRO](#)).
  - The original Atlas was released by SAC in 2011 and has over the years been used extensively by all the State Governments also in their planning processes.
- Two new **Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance)**, **Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat** and **Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary in UP** were also announced on the occasion.

### Why is The Day Celebrated on 2<sup>nd</sup> February ?

- This day marks the date of **the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1971** in the Iranian city of Ramsar.
  - 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 **countries with the most Ramsar Sites are the United Kingdom (175) and Mexico (142)**, as per the Ramsar List. Bolivia has the largest area with 148,000 sq km under the Convention protection.
- It was first celebrated in 1997.
- **Theme for 2022:** Wetlands Action for People and Nature.

### What is a Wetland and its Significance ?

- **Wetlands:**
  - **Wetlands** are ecosystems saturated with water, either seasonally or permanently. They include **mangroves, marshes, rivers, lakes, deltas, floodplains and flooded forests, rice-fields, coral reefs, marine areas** no deeper than 6 meters at low tide, as well as human-made wetlands such as waste-water treatment ponds and reservoirs.
- **Significance:**
  - Wetlands are **a critical part of our natural environment**. They mitigate floods, protect coastlines and build **community resilience to disasters, reduce the impacts of floods, absorb pollutants** and improve water quality.
  - Wetlands are **critical to human and planet life**. More than 1 billion people depend on them for a living and 40% of the world's species live and breed in wetlands.
  - They are **a vital source for food, raw materials, genetic resources** for medicines, and

- hydropower.
- **30% of land-based carbon** is stored in peatland.
- They play **an important role in transport, tourism and the cultural and spiritual well-being** of people.
- Many wetlands are **areas of natural beauty** and many are **important to Aboriginal people**.

## What are the Threats related to Wetlands ?

- As per the **IPBES** ([Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#))'s **global assessment**, wetlands are the most threatened ecosystem.
- Wetlands are **disappearing 3 times faster than forests** due to human activities and global warming.
- According to **UNESCO**, the threat to wetlands will have an adverse impact on **40% of the world's flora and fauna** that live or breed in wetlands.
- **Major threats:** Agriculture, development, pollution and [climate change](#).

## What is the status of Wetlands in India ?

- India has a network of **49 Ramsar sites** covering an **area of 10,93,636 hectares**, the **highest in South Asia**.
  - **Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary in UP** provides a safe wintering and staging ground for a large number of species of the Central Asian Flyway while **Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary (Gujarat)** is a coastal wetland with rich avifaunal diversity providing a safe habitat to endangered and vulnerable species.
- In **India**, according to the National Wetland Inventory and Assessment compiled by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), **wetlands are 4.63% of the total geographical area of the country**.
  - India has 19 types of wetlands.
  - In state-wise distribution of wetlands, **Gujarat is at the top** (17.56% of total geographical area of the state or 22.7% of total wetlands areas of the country thanks to a long coastline.
  - It is followed by Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

## What is the Significance of Ramsar Listing ?

- It is like an **ISO certification**. They can take it off the list as well if it doesn't meet their standards continuously. It's **a feather in the cap** but there is a cost to it and that cost can be paid only if there is brand value.
- **Ramsar tag makes it incumbent upon authority to strengthen the protection regime** there and also creates defenses against encroachment.
- A number of species of birds prefer to **avoid the Himalaya and instead choose the route passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan** to enter the Indian sub-continent via Gujarat and Rajasthan. Thus, **Gujarat becomes the first landing point of many international migratory species** of ducks, waders, plovers, terns, gulls etc and shorebirds as well as birds of prey.
- Wetlands in India **act as foraging and resting grounds for the migratory birds** during winter.
  - According to [Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals \(CMS\)](#), CAF (Central Asian Flyway), which includes 30 countries, covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory waterbird species, including 29 globally threatened and near-threatened species, which breed, migrate and winter within the region.

[Source: PIB](#)

