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Q17

Comment on the National Wetland Conservation Programme initiated by the Government of India and name a few India's wetlands of international importance included in the Ramsar Sites.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS III · 15 marks · Environment and Conservation

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Core demand of the question

- Comment on the National Wetland Conservation Programme
- Name a few Indian wetlands of international importance on the Ramsar list

Revision summary

The National Wetland Conservation Programme began in 1985-86 to fund wetlands of national importance.

It merged with the lake plan in 2013 into the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems.

The **Wetlands Rules 2017** add a legal bar on filling and dumping in notified sites.

India had about 75 Ramsar sites by 2022-23; examples are **Chilika**, Keoladeo, Sundarbans, Loktak and Wular.

Listing is not protection unless sewage and encroachment are actually stopped.

Introduction

Wetlands store flood water, recharge wells, hold fish and birds, and buffer the coast. India began a dedicated **National Wetland Conservation Programme (NWCP)** in the mid-1980s so these sites would not become the next landfill. The global badge for the most important of them is the **Ramsar** list.

Body

National Wetland Conservation Programme

- **NWCP started in 1985-86 to identify and fund** wetlands of national importance: inventory, protection, catchment treatment, and awareness.
- It ran beside the **National Lake Conservation Plan**. In **2013** the two were merged into the **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)**, so lakes and wetlands share one Union scheme.
- Legal backup later includes the **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**, which bar notification-violating filling, dumping, and untreated discharge in listed wetlands, with State wetland authorities.

- **Comment:** the programme created a **national list and some restoration money**. On the ground, many urban wetlands still shrink under real estate, sewage, and encroachment. Rules exist; **enforcement and city planning** are the weak joint. **NWCP/NPCA** is necessary but not sufficient without State land records and sewage plants.

Ramsar sites in India (examples)

- India is a party to the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971)**. By **2022-23** it had about **75** Ramsar sites (the count rose further after the 2023 paper; use the then figure as "about 75").
- **Chilika Lake** (Odisha) - brackish lagoon; Irrawaddy dolphin and migratory birds.
- **Keoladeo National Park** (Rajasthan) - former Bharatpur bird sanctuary.
- **Sundarbans** (West Bengal) - mangrove; tiger and storm buffer.
- **Loktak Lake** (Manipur) - floating phumdis; Keibul Lamjao.
- **Wular Lake** (Jammu and Kashmir) - large freshwater lake of the Jhelum.
- **Others often cited:** **Harike** (Punjab), **Point Calimere** (Tamil Nadu), **Ashtamudi** (Kerala), **Bhitarkanika** (Odisha), **Sambhar** (Rajasthan), **Kolleru** (Andhra Pradesh).

Ramsar listing brings **international attention and some funds**. It does not by itself stop a local landfill. **NWCP/NPCA** and the 2017 Rules are the domestic tools that must match the badge.

Flow diagram

NWCP 1985-86 -> NPCA 2013
 NPCA 2013 -> 2017 Wetland Rules
 Ramsar list -> Chilika Keoladeo Sundarbans
 Ramsar list -> Loktak Wular Harike
 2017 Wetland Rules -> On-ground protection
 Ramsar list -> On-ground protection

Conclusion

NWCP put nationally important wetlands on a funded list from 1985-86 and later folded into **NPCA**. A few dozen Indian sites, about 75 by 2022-23, are Ramsar wetlands of international importance, including **Chilika**, Keoladeo, Sundarbans, Loktak and Wular. The programme's gap is enforcement against fill and sewage, not the absence of a scheme name.

Facts & figures

NWCP

National Wetland Conservation Programme, launched 1985-86 for wetlands of national importance.

NPCA

National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems, 2013 merger of NWCP and the National Lake Conservation Plan.

Wetlands Rules 2017

Prohibit specified harmful activities in notified wetlands; State wetland authorities implement.

Ramsar count

About 75 Indian sites by Independence-year 2022 announcements; the list continued to grow after 2023.

Chilika

Asia's large brackish lagoon in Odisha; an early and flagship Indian Ramsar site.

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