GLOBAL WETLAND OUTLOOK 2025: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Africa's wetlands among the most degraded in the world: 2025 Global Wetland Outlook

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Global Wetland Outlook 2025 highlights that 22% of global wetlands have been lost since 1970 due to urbanization, industrial growth, and climate change, necessitating urgent increased investment and collaborative conservation efforts.

Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) 2025: Overview and Key Findings

- **Nature of GWO:** The GWO is a periodic assessment report released by the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention. Its primary purpose is to offer comprehensive insights into the current state, ongoing trends, and significant challenges confronting wetland ecosystems worldwide.
- **Global Distribution:** Wetlands globally encompass an expansive area, ranging from 1,425 to 1,800 million hectares. This considerable expanse constitutes approximately 6% of the Earth's total land surface.
- **Alarming Degradation Trends:** Since 1970, there has been a substantial and concerning loss of wetlands, with approximately 411 million hectares disappearing globally. This represents a significant 22% decline in the overall global wetland extent, highlighting a continuous and rapid rate of loss.
- **Primary Drivers of Loss:** Unplanned urbanization, rapid industrial growth, and extensive infrastructure development are identified as the foremost causes of wetland loss, particularly prominent in regions like Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.
- **Regional-Specific Threats:**
    - **Europe:** Prolonged drought conditions are the dominant threat leading to wetland loss and ecological deterioration.
    - **North America and Oceania:** The proliferation of invasive species poses the most significant threat to wetland health.
- **Economic Link to Wetland Condition:** The health and functional integrity of wetlands show a direct correlation with a country's income level. For instance, African wetlands, despite being valued at an estimated USD 825.7 billion, are generally in a poorer state compared to global standards, often reflecting the economic challenges faced by countries in the region.

Understanding Wetland Degradation

- **Definition:** Wetland degradation refers to a noticeable decline in the ecological health, vital functions, and overall integrity of wetland ecosystems. This degradation is typically driven by anthropogenic (human-induced) or natural pressures.

- **Consequences:** The decline manifests in various detrimental ways, including a significant loss of biodiversity, a reduction in water quality, and a diminished capacity of these ecosystems to provide essential services that benefit both nature and human well-being.
- **Factors Contributing to Degradation:**
    - **Africa and Asia:** The leading causes are rapid urbanization and unregulated industrial and infrastructure development.
    - **Europe:** The primary factor is prolonged drought conditions.
    - **North America and Oceania:** Invasive species are the most critical threats.
    - **Global Contributing Factors:** Across all regions, additional factors such as agricultural expansion (leading to conversion and pollution), diversion of water for other uses, various forms of pollution (industrial, domestic, agricultural runoff), construction of dams (altering natural water flows), the pervasive impacts of climate change, direct encroachment for development, and unsustainable tourism practices all contribute significantly to wetland degradation.

Defining a Wetland

- **Core Characteristics:** A wetland is fundamentally a land area that is either permanently or seasonally saturated with water. This consistent or periodic inundation creates unique ecosystems.
- **Ecological Support:** These water-saturated environments are crucial because they specifically support aquatic and semi-aquatic species, fostering a rich biodiversity adapted to these specific conditions.
- **India's Wetland Coverage:** In India, wetlands constitute approximately 4.6% of the nation's total geographical area, highlighting their significant presence within the country's diverse landscapes.
- **Prominent Indian Wetlands:** Notable examples of wetlands in India include Chilika Lake in Odisha, Loktak Lake in Manipur, and Wular Lake in Jammu & Kashmir.

Global Initiatives for Wetland Conservation

- **Ramsar Convention (1971):** This is an international treaty specifically dedicated to the conservation and wise use of wetlands globally. India became a contracting party to this convention in 1982.
    - **Ramsar Sites in India:** As of July 2025, India boasts 91 Ramsar Sites, which are wetlands recognized for their international importance. Recent additions (Environment Day 2025) include Khichan in Phalodi and Menar in Udaipur, Rajasthan.
- **Montreux Record:** Maintained under the Ramsar Convention, this is a register that specifically lists Ramsar Sites that are facing, or are likely to face, significant threats to their ecological character due to human interference.
    - **Indian Sites on Montreux Record:** India currently has two wetlands on this critical list: Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan and Loktak Lake in Manipur.

- **Conference of the Contracting Parties (COPs):** These are regular meetings of the countries that are parties to the Ramsar Convention. The 15th meeting (COP15) is scheduled to be held in Zimbabwe to discuss and prioritize global wetland conservation efforts further.

- **Other Relevant Initiatives:**

    - **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** This international convention broadly promotes the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity, including inland water ecosystems.

    - **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Several SDGs directly or indirectly reinforce the imperative for wetland conservation, notably Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 13 (Climate Action), and 15 (Life on Land).

India's Initiatives for Wetland Conservation

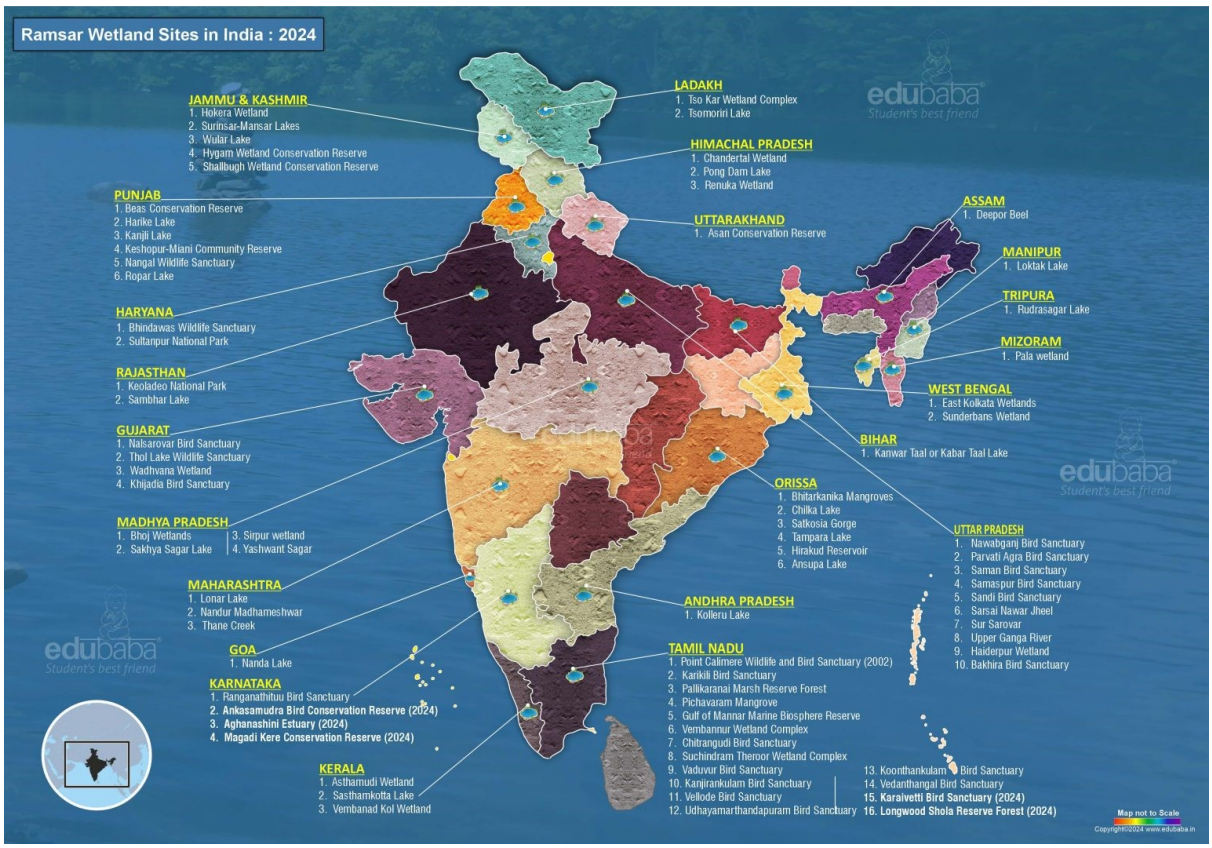
- **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017:** India has enacted these rules under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. This provides a crucial legal framework for the protection, conservation, and sustainable management of wetlands across the country.

- **National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA):** This is a centrally sponsored scheme that offers both financial and technical assistance to state governments. Its aim is to support and facilitate the conservation and management of identified wetlands and lakes throughout India.

- **State Wetland Authorities:** Under the guidance and oversight of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), these authorities are responsible for managing and overseeing site-specific wetland conservation activities at the state level, ensuring localized implementation.

- **Amrit Dharohar Scheme:** This initiative was announced in the Union Budget 2023–24. Its core objective is to promote the effective conservation of Ramsar sites within India by emphasizing and encouraging community-based approaches to management and sustainable utilization.

- **Part of Namami Gange Programme:** Wetland restoration and rejuvenation projects are also integrated and implemented as part of the broader National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), particularly focusing on wetlands located within river basin areas to improve overall river health.



Recommendations for Enhanced Wetland Conservation

- **Increased Investment:** There is a critical and urgent need for significantly increased public and private financial investment dedicated specifically to wetland restoration and conservation initiatives globally.

- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Regional and cross-border cooperation is essential. This must be strengthened to facilitate robust knowledge sharing, efficient technology transfer, and the development and execution of coordinated conservation strategies across national boundaries.

- **Improved Assessment and Valuation:** National accounting systems should undergo reform. They must be updated to formally incorporate and recognize the full economic value of the diverse ecosystem services that wetlands provide, ensuring their contribution to national economies is quantified.

- **Promote Nature-Based Solutions:** Actively promoting and implementing nature-based solutions (NbS) can effectively contribute to building climate resilience. This approach also helps in ensuring the long-term sustainability and ecological integrity of wetland ecosystems as natural infrastructure.

Source: https://www.downtoearth.org.in/africa/africas-wetlands-among-the-most-degraded-in-the-world-2025-global-wetland-outlook#google_vignette