

Ramsar Convention

What is Ramsar Convention?

The Ramsar Convention or Wetland Convention is an international treaty that promotes the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. It is also known as the Convention on Wetlands.

- The Ramsar Convention came to effect in 1975 after being signed in 1971.
- International and local action was encouraged to put a step in the right direction of sustainable development.
- The late 1960s saw the foundation of the convention by Eskandar Firouz, former environment minister of Iran, Luc Hoffmann of Tour du Valat research station in the Camargue in France, and Geoffrey Matthews of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge.
- The conference adopted the terms of the agreement that was held in the Iranian Caspian Sea resort of Ramsar on 2 February 1971. The convention has turned 50 in 2021.

3 Pillars of Ramsar Convention

There are three fundamental principles that go behind the purpose of the Ramsar Convention:

- Encouraging proper and wise use of the wetlands: These sites are rich hubs of biodiversity and future sites of sustainable development. Their use needs to be controlled and judicious.
- Listening of Wetlands of International Importance: This convention identifies and designates suitable wetlands under the Ramsar List for their effective management.
- Promotion of international cooperation: The convention aims to facilitate cooperation on an international scale over the transboundary wetlands and shared wetland systems.

Wetland Convention- What are Wetlands?

Coming to the basics, wetlands are ecosystems that are seasonally or permanently saturated with water. This ecosystem has significant biodiversity. It grows mangroves. It has marshes, rivers, lakes, deltas, floodplains, flooded forests, rice fields, coral reefs, and marine areas no deeper than 6 meters at low tide, as well as human-made wetlands such as waste-water treatment ponds and reservoirs.

While wetlands comprise to be only 6% of the total Earth's land surface, it houses and breeds nearly 40% of all flora and fauna. This makes wetlands extremely important for the sustenance of a healthy ecological cycle.

Ramsar Convention in India

Recently, a few Ramsar sites have been added to the Wetland Convention. Note the latest news about

- Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat and Bokhara Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh was recently declared as Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance on the occasion of World Wetland day 2022 (2nd January 2022). The announcement happened at Sultanpur National Park, a Ramsar site in Haryana.
- India has proposed 26 sites under the wetland convention which shall make the total 75 sites as the nation observes its 75th Independence year.
- The proposed new sites include Thane Creek from Maharashtra, Nanda Lake from Goa, 12 sites from Tamil Nadu, 4 in Odisha, and 3 in Madhya Pradesh among others.
- The 50th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention in 2021 saw the establishment of the Centre for Wetland Conservation & Management, the first in the country. It is under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), at the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) in Chennai.

Ramsar Convention Sites in India

Wetlands of International Importance are called Ramsar Sites. Below mentioned is the latest list of Ramsar sites in India

S No	Ramsar Sites in India	State – Location
1	Tso Kar Wetland Complex	Ladakh
2	Keoladeo National Park	Rajasthan
3	Wular lake	Jammu & Kashmir
4	Surinsar- Mansar lakes	Jammu & Kashmir
5	Hokera Wetland	Jammu & Kashmir
6	Chilika Lake	Odisha
7	Sasthamkotta lake	Kerala
8	Sambhar lake	Rajasthan
9	Sultanpur National Park	Haryana
10	Nandur Madhameshwar	Maharashtra
11	Saman Bird Sanctuary	Uttar Pradesh
12	Chandra Taal	Himachal Pradesh
13	Lonar Lake	Maharashtra
14	Rudrasagar Lake	Tripura
15	Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary	Punjab
16	Bokhara Wildlife Sanctuary	Uttar Pradesh

17	Tsomoriri	Ladakh
18	Beas Conservation Reserve	Punjab
19	Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary	Gujarat
20	Kolleru lake	Andhra Pradesh
21	Deepor Beel	Assam
22	Parvati Agra Bird Sanctuary	Uttar Pradesh
23	Bhoj Wetlands	Madhya Pradesh
24	Sandi Bird Sanctuary	Uttar Pradesh
25	Asan Barrage	Uttarakhand
26	Sarsai Nawar Jheel	Uttar Pradesh
27	Haiderpur Wetland	Uttar Pradesh
28	Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary	Haryana
29	Harike Wetlands	Punjab
30	Kanjli Wetland	Punjab
31	Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary	Uttar Pradesh
32	Sunderban Wetland	West Bengal
33	Loktak lake	Manipur
34	East Kolkata Wetlands	West Bengal
35	Renuka lake	Himachal Pradesh
36	Ashtamudi Wetland	Kerala
37	Vembanad Kol Wetland	Kerala
38	Wadhvana Wetland	Gujarat
39	Sur Sarovar	Uttar Pradesh
40	Bhitarkanika Mangroves	Odisha
41	Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve	Punjab
42	Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary	Tamil Nadu
43	Ropar Wetland	Punjab
44	Samaspur Bird Sanctuary	Uttar Pradesh
45	Pong Dam lake	Himachal Pradesh

46	Nalsarovar Bird sanctuary	Gujarat
47	Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary	Gujarat
48	Upper Ganga river	Uttar Pradesh
49	Kanwar Lake or Kabal Taal	Bihar

Need for Ramsar Convention

To understand the need for Wetland Convention, it is important to understand How are Wetlands under threat?

- The most common threat to wetlands remains to be the fast-paced urbanization of our capitalistic world. Urban wetlands are constantly under immense developmental pressure to provide for residential, industrial, and commercial needs.
- Unplanned urban and agricultural progress has caused the wetlands to be drained and transformed. This causes substantial ecological as well as economic losses in the longer run.
- The Green Revolution of the 1970s saw the transformation of wetlands into paddy fields. To meet the irrigation needs, large reservoirs, canals, and dams were built. This severely depleted the hydrology of the surrounding wetlands.
- The drain of the hydrology of wetlands is not limited to the era of the Green Revolution, as canals and diversions are regularly constructed to hydrate the lower arid regions. This alters the drainage patterns and causes noticeable degradation. Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary, Loktak Lake, Chilika Lake, and Vembanad Kole are some names that have been impacted negatively because of this practice.
- Over withdrawal of groundwater has led us to salinization.
- Other obvious contributors are deforestation and pollution. Removal of vegetation causes erosion of soil and siltation while the infamous unrestricted sewage dumping in freshwaters have threatened the quality of wetlands.
- The rise in demand for seafood has added to the economic incentives of wetlands causing the development of mangrove forests into pisciculture and aquaculture ponds.
- Climate change is real and responsible for the increased air temperature, scanty precipitation, increased frequency of natural calamities, and the hike in the atmospheric CO₂ concentration.

Global Initiatives for Wetland Conservation

The Ramsar Convention is one such initiative taken on a global scale for wetland preservation.

- Montreux Record is maintained as a part of the Ramsar List. It is a register of wetland sites where changes in ecology have been observed or can occur as a result of technological progress or ill effects of human interference.
- There are two wetlands in India that are in the Montreux Record, namely Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan and Loktak Lake in Manipur. Chilka Lake in Odisha was there earlier but was later removed.
- World Wetland Day is celebrated on the 2nd of February every year to raise awareness about the importance and endangerment of wetlands.

- A global campaign called Cities4Forests works closely with cities across the globe to connect with forests. They emphasize the importance of wetlands and their multiple benefits in an attempt to help combat climate change and protect biodiversity in cities.

Wetland Conservation in India

Other conservation initiatives taken in India apart from Ramsar Convention are as follows

- National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)
- Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017
- National Wetland Inventory and Assessment was carried out by ISRO. They used remote sensing satellites from 2006 to 2011 and were able to map around two lakh wetlands in India.

Facts about Ramsar Convention

Owing to the competitive nature of the UPSC Exams, the depth of knowledge that is to be possessed by students needs to be dealt with tactically. Go through this bulleted list of important facts about the Ramsar Convention:

- Ramsar Convention is the only internationally recognized treaty that centers itself around a specific ecosystem.
- Initially, it was started with the idea of waterbird habitat conservation. Over time, it has become all-encompassing about wetland conservation issues.
- The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat is its official name.
- The Ramsar Convention covers three important subjects:
 - There are now 171 contracting parties. They are expected to designate suitable wetlands in their territory under the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.
 - The designated wetlands are to be taken care of and judiciously used.
 - Shared wetlands by two or more territories are to be used after due consultation.
- Ramsar Convention is not a regulatory regime. It was modified under the Paris Protocol in 1982 and by the Regina Amendments in 1987.
- World Wetlands Day was first celebrated in 1997 and has been ever since celebrated annually on February 2nd to mark its anniversary.
- This conference happens every three years. They come with a new plan of action with its set goals every six years. The latest one was formulated in the 12th convention for the years 2016-2024 and is the 4th plan of their tenure.
- It has 6 partners that are international organizations, namely
 - Birdlife International
 - IUCN
 - Wetlands International
 - WWF
 - International Water Management Institute
 - Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust