



Wetlands International South Asia
Annual Report
2019 - 2020

Published by

Wetlands International South Asia
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New Delhi - 110024, INDIA
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Report ID

2020 - Annual Report - 01

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Wetlands International South Asia

Wetlands International South Asia is a non-government organisation working for sustaining and restoring wetlands, their resources and biodiversity in the South Asia region. Its office in New Delhi (India) was established in 1996 as a part of the Wetlands International network. Wetlands International is a global, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated to conservation and restoration of wetlands, and presently works in over 100 countries through a network of 20 regional and national offices and expert networks with Global Office in The Netherlands. Wetlands International is also one of the five International Organisation Partners of the Ramsar Convention. In 2005, Wetlands International South Asia was registered under the Societies Registration Act of Government of India (retaining remit of South Asia region).

Wetlands International South Asia works for wetland conservation in ways which relate to the nature of wetlands as ecosystems, and the wider biophysical and social contexts in which they are placed and function. The organisation endeavors to use a mix of approaches including technical knowledge, policy dialogue

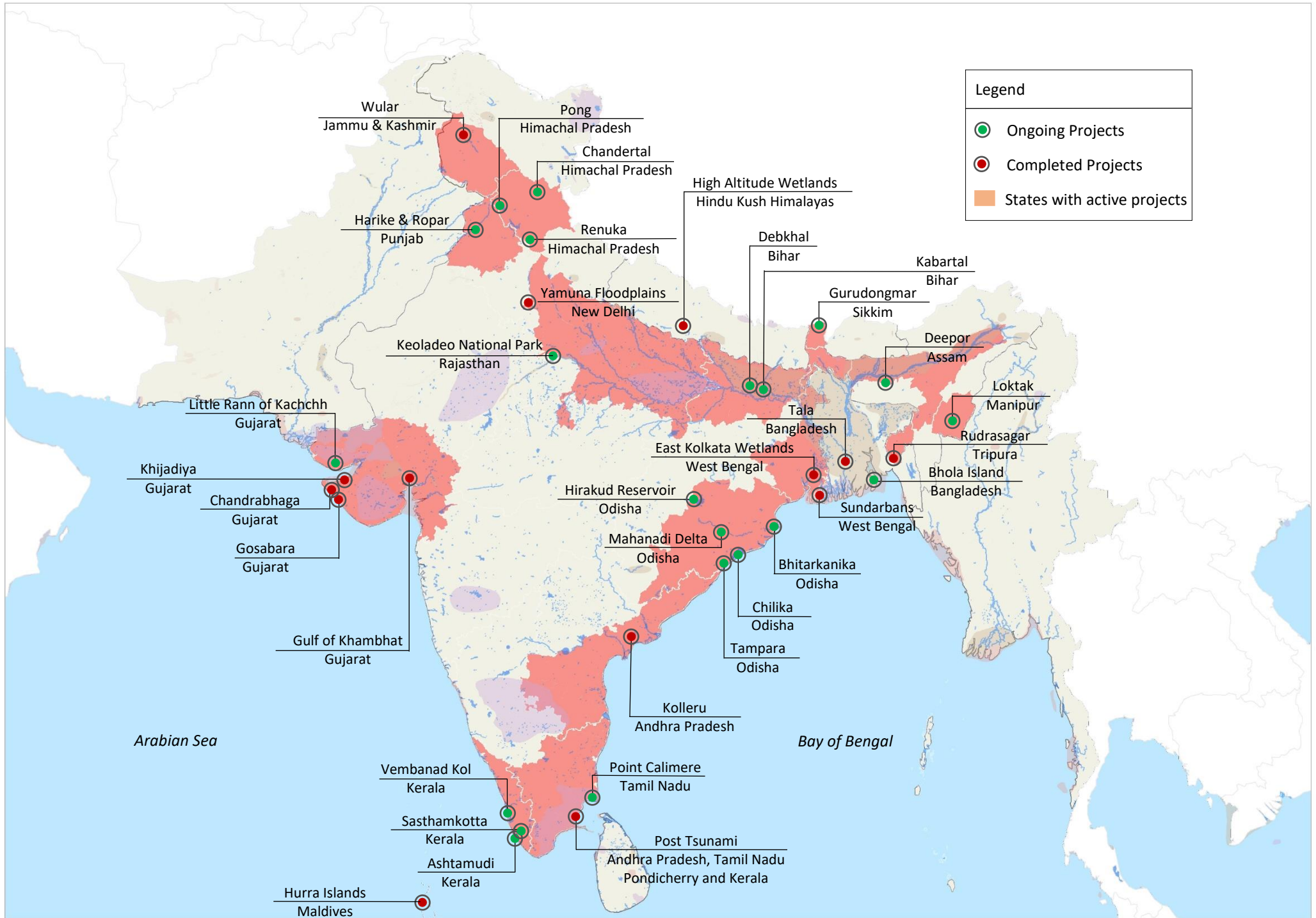
and field demonstrations for addressing various issues related to wetland management. A multidisciplinary team within the organisation and expert network enable providing evidence-based scientific and technical advice to central and state governments, wetland authorities, and civil society on various aspects of wetland management. The projects implemented have covered the following wide-ranging elements, designed and delivered in partnership with central government ministries, state government departments and agencies, wetland management authorities, civil society and research organisations:

- integrated management planning
- wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring system
- valuation of ecosystem services and biodiversity
- environmental flows assessment
- conservation of critical habitats of wetland-dependent species,
- capacity development for integrated wetland management
- policy formulation support
- community-led ecosystem-based approaches for disaster risk reduction

- communication, education and outreach

Presently, Dr Sidharth Kaul (former Advisor, Wetlands, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) is the President of the Society. Dr Ajit Pattnaik (former Principal Chief Conservation of Forests, Forest and Environment Department, Government of Odisha) is the Vice President. Dr J. K. Garg (Senior Fellow, TERI School of Advanced Sciences) is the Honorary Treasurer of the Society. Dr Ritesh Kumar (Director, Wetlands International South Asia) is the ex-officio Secretary of the Society.

The Governing Body comprises the Office Bearers, three members elected by the General Body and Chief Executive Officer, Wetlands International. Dr C. K. Varshney (Professor Emeritus, Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University), Dr E. J. James (Professor Emeritus, Karunya University) and Dr Asad Rahmani (former Director, Bombay Natural History Society) serve as elected members of the General Body. Ms Jane Madgwick, CEO, Wetlands International represents Wetlands International on the Governing Body.



From the President

It gives me great pleasure once again to present before you the Annual Report of Wetlands International South Asia Society for 2019-2020. We have made it more target oriented and projected it in a form so that our main efforts put in are easily understandable and pave our way towards result oriented actions to save our wetlands from further degradation.

We also thank our General Body members for reposing faith in the same management team once again and electing us for 2020-2023 triennium. I am sure your guidance and support will always steer our way towards increasing the Society's role towards better management of wetlands not only in India but in entire South Asia.

During the year, the Society continued its efforts work for establishment of a South Asia regional initiative to promote wise use of wetlands in this region through capacity development and supporting application of recent scientific and technical advancements in the management of wetlands. The first consultation meeting in this regard was held at Colombo in September, 2019, wherein representatives of five national focal points of South Asian countries reaffirmed the values of a regional platform, and clarified the role such a platform can have in the region. The work on integration of climate change dimensions of wetlands was further advanced in the form of a national vulnerability assessment. Through a proactive network of NGOs and CSOs, we enabled integration of wetlands in local developmental plans, thus demonstrating an alternative approach to engage communities in conservation and wise use of wetlands resources. In High Altitude Himalayas region, we undertook baseline assessments of wetlands in Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh, which will be integrated in management plans for these sites.

We also continued to work with Global Conventions. We supported designation of new Ramsar Sites, while stressing on better management of existing sites with proper monitoring and evaluation. We also played an active role in framing up of National Action Plan for implementation of Central Asian Flyway Action Plan, a commitment which was highlighted by the Hon'ble Prime Minister at the 13th Conference of Parties meeting held in February at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Since March 2020, world over the spread of Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to revalue our relationship with nature. While economies have taken a hit and the country stares into one of its worst recessions, nature has revitalized. Images of improved water quality in river Ganges and Yamuna, rejuvenated wetlands, and reappearing waterbird congregations abound on the internet and social media, are reminding us of a fact that the conservationists have long been crying hoarse to communicate our economic development pathways are not consistent with conservation. We have used the time to work on technical deliverables such as manuals on management planning, wetlands and climate change and wetlands and disaster risk reduction.

While we have shifted to new working arrangement in a post Covid-19 world, the work has nonetheless continued with great vigor. In the coming year, we will be setting up our priorities for the next decade and your inputs will be vital in the process. We will also work to expand our membership base so that our reach and representativeness is enhanced. The work on capacity development of wetlands managers and stakeholders will be deepened and new methods of delivering training using virtual tools will be tested.

In 2021, Wetlands International South Asia will be marking its silver jubilee year of inception. This landmark will be celebrated in a befitting manner with events taking place round the year.

Once again, we thank all our Society members, donors, partners and staff for joining us in the endeavor to conserve and sustainably manage wetlands

Dr Sidharth Kaul
President

September 23, 2020
New Delhi



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Abbreviations

AWC	Asian Waterbird Census
BNHS	Bombay Natural History Society
CAF	Central Asian Flyway
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
CoP	Conference of Parties
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDMP	District Disaster Management Plan
DORP	Development Organisation of the Rural Poor
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
Eco-DRR	Ecosystem based approaches for Disaster Risk Reduction
EMR	Ecosystem Management and Restoration
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
GPDRR	Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
HAW	High Altitude Wetlands
ILEC	International Lake Environment Committee
IKI	International Climate Initiative
IRM	Integrated Risk Management
IWC	International Waterbird Census
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PfR	Partners for Resilience
RIS	Ramsar Information Sheet
RRCEA	Ramsar Regional Center East Asia
SWAK	State Wetlands Authority Kerala
TNC	Third National Communication
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPSWA	Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

From the Director's Desk

The year 2019-2020 set the tone for the super year for nature, although the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly overshadowed its unfolding and many processes such as setting of post-2020 biodiversity framework has been delayed.

For the first time, the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Migratory Species met in India at Gandhinagar in February 2020. After more than a decade since we facilitated the meeting of Range Countries of the Central Asian Flyway in 2005, we see the Flyway Action Plan being operationalized. India has taken a lead by preparing its own national plan, to which we contributed in drafting, and is putting down the blueprint for a Flyway Secretariat for range countries. With the CoP Presidency being with India for the next three years, it will be an important window for us to pursue greater action on high ornithological value wetlands which form an important ecological network in Central Asian Flyway region.

2021 will be silver jubilee year for Wetlands International South Asia. We have come a long way from a humble beginning with implementing first overseas funded project on wetlands in North East India to be working presently in over 15 states, with diverse stakeholder groups and partners. Yet, the continued loss of wetlands reminds us to

enhance our reach and impact. With a new membership strategy being considered by the Governing Body, we will be able to diversify skill sets, capacities and geographical presence, provide a platform for diverse stakeholders to engage in and contribute affirmatively to conservation of wetlands in South Asia region, and enhance representation in Wetlands International South Asia's voice and opinion on issues related to wetlands.

The entire region is replete with stories of wetlands reclamation and wanton destruction. Yet, there are also stories of hope, coming in small measures in efforts of motivated individuals. From a school child of Kashmir who is daily spending time to keep Dal clean to a techie in Bangalore who has revived several urban lakes, there are several stories which indicate that all is not lost. While we will continue to step up pressure on government by reminding on the consequences of wetlands degradation, our efforts will also be directed towards understanding the motivations behind positive actions taken by these individuals and networks, and try to amplify and upscale efforts.

The coming year will also mark five decades of establishment of Ramsar Convention. Unfortunately, Convention implementation in most South Asian countries has been limited

to designation of Ramsar sites, without creating enabling conditions for addressing the threats on these ecosystems. We will be working on effective monitoring of wetlands, and building capacity of managers to develop and implement integrated management of these ecosystems. We will also work to bring to fore the role of wetlands in building water system resilience. Forging natural infrastructure of wetlands with the conventional physical infrastructure of water resources can bring multiple advantages to the water sector, and provide the water sector required flexibility to address climate change induced uncertainties and risks.

The work showcased in this Annual Report is a reflection of astute guidance of our Board Members, continued support of donors and partners, and hard work put in by my colleagues.

Dr Ritesh Kumar
Director

September 23, 2020
New Delhi





Gurudongmar, Sikkim – Wetlands International South Asia is preparing management plan for this High-Altitude Wetland

Year at a glance



The work of Wetlands International South Asia is guided by the South Asia Regional Strategy 2015-25. Regional targets and actions around three workstreams (healthy wetlands nature, vibrant coasts and deltas, and replenished water stores from mountains to sea) guide the organization towards achieving its mission and goal.

Wetlands International South Asia has a mission to “sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity”. The long-term goal that the organization seeks to achieve is: “wetlands are wisely used and restored for the role they play in improving human livelihoods, conserving biodiversity, sustaining the water cycle and reducing climate change and impacts”.

During 2019-2020, our work focused on the following areas, cutting across one or more workstreams:

- Building a South Asia platform for wetlands managers
- Wetlands and climate resilience
- Conserving high-altitude wetlands
- Local action for integrating wetlands conservation in water security and disaster risk reduction plans
- Strengthening wetlands management
- Mobilizing citizen-science for waterbirds
- Engaging with Conventions and Global Platforms

In the following sections, we present highlights of our work, and also indicate the ways in which the work will be continued towards achieving the desired results.

Building blocks for a South Asia platform for wetlands' managers

Highlights

Regional meeting of Ramsar National Focal Points endorsed the relevance of a regional platform and identified capacity building areas

Workstreams

Healthy wetlands nature

Partners

Ramsar Regional Center East Asia, International Water Management Institute, International Lake Environment Committee

The Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention are committed to the wise use of wetlands, through effective policies and programmes. Executing management plans in an integrated manner with sustainability as a guiding principle is a critical element of wetlands wise use. Regional homogeneities in the wetland regimes in South Asia, their influencing drivers and pressures, policy environment, and capacities indicate possibilities of benefitting from regional collaboration and exchange. Keeping this in view, we have initiated the process for establishment of a South Asia platform for wetlands managers, with Ramsar Convention as the binding glue.

At the Ramsar 13th Conference of Parties meeting held in October 2018 at Dubai, we

entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ramsar Regional Center East Asia for building capacity for integrated wetlands management and strengthening implementation of Ramsar Convention in the South Asia region.

In 2019-2020, work on establishing South Asia platform was continued, key milestones being a follow-up meeting of South Asia Ramsar Site managers at Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Integrated Lake Basin Management workshop for South Asian wetlands managers in our office.

Ramsar National Focal Points Roundtable, Colombo

A Roundtable of Ramsar National Focal Points of South Asia region was held during

September 2-3, 2019 at International Water Management Institute Headquarters in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Organised by Wetlands International South Asia in collaboration with the International Water Management Institute and Department of Wildlife and Conservation, Government of Sri Lanka, the overarching aim of the meeting was to identify specific capacity development and knowledge needs, collaborating on which we can create an enabling environment for the wise use of wetlands in South Asia, and mechanisms for enhancing learning and experience sharing within the region.

Nominees of Ramsar Focal Points from India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, along with officials of Wetlands International South Asia, International Water Management Institute, the World Bank Sri Lanka Office, and Global Water Partnership attended the two-day meeting.

The roundtable participants agreed on the need for establishment of a South Asia Regional Forum for Wetlands under the aegis of Ramsar Convention. Wetlands International South Asia was encouraged to develop a proposal for consideration as a Ramsar Regional Initiative, with due consultation and approval of all Ramsar Focal Points of the region. The purpose of the regional initiative would be to support the implementation of Ramsar Convention by building capacity, regional exchange, and sharing best practices

and lessons learnt. The platform could also support:

- monitoring of Ramsar Sites and other wetlands in the region;
- collation of case studies and best practices on wetlands wise use;
- development of a roster of wetlands expert in the region; and,
- capacity development of wetlands managers.

The members proposed that the first training course be organised on 'wetlands and water management' theme. Bangladesh offered to host the next roundtable meeting of the platform. The RRCEA has kindly offered to support organization of the follow-up workshop, wherein we also aim to finalize the modalities of the platform.

Meeting of International Lake Basin Management Practitioners

International Lake Environment Committee Foundation (ILEC) and Wetlands International South Asia held a three-day workshop of wetlands practitioners to discuss progress in implementation of Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM) plans. The workshop was

attended by 23 participants from India and Nepal.

Case studies on lake basin management initiatives from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Nepal were discussed. Dr A.K. Pattnaik (Vice-President, Wetlands International South Asia) oriented the members on the integrated management guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Dr N. Nakamura (Professor, RCSE-SU and chair, ILEC) further provided insights on governance issues that can ensure proper management of wetlands. ILEC and Wetlands International South Asia are in discussions for formalizing their collaboration for building capacity of wetlands managers in applying basin-scale management in South Asia region.



Participants from India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the Roundtable meeting, Colombo



Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu: Wetlands International South Asia is assisting Forest Department in integrating climate risks in management planning

Wetlands and climate resilience

Highlights

- *Developed a national wetlands trend index (1980-2014)*
- *Completed a qualitative vulnerability assessment of wetlands to climate change and impacts*
- *Assessed climate scenarios for Chilika (RCP 4.5 and 8.5) to guide for climate inclusive management planning*

Workstreams

Healthy wetlands nature, Vibrant coasts and deltas

Partners

GIZ-India, Chilika Development Authority

Management planning for wetlands seldom take into account the risks induced by climate change. Wetlands International South Asia, with financial support of International Climate Initiative (IKI) Programme of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is demonstrating the ways in which climate vulnerability of wetlands can be assessed and factored in management planning processes.

Climate vulnerability assessment

The MoEFCC, within the preparations for India's Third National Communication (TNC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, has included wetlands within assessments related to Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation. Wetlands International South Asia was entrusted with

development of a climate change adaptation framework for Indian wetlands, based on overview of published literature.

A wetlands extent trend index was constructed using data on extent change from 240 wetlands. The index is based on the Wetland Extent Trends method used in the Global Wetlands Outlook. The index for 1980-2014 indicates an average decline in natural wetlands area by 41% and a near commensurate increase in area under human-made wetlands by 44%.

Natural inland wetlands were observed to have increased in Trans-Himalayan Zone (by 87%), and declined in all other zones (minimum loss of 5% in Desert zone, and maximum loss of 71% in the Gangetic Plains).

Inland human-made wetlands have increased in all biogeographic zones (minimum in Deccan Peninsula by 3% and maximum in Desert by 257%). Coastal natural wetlands have declined by 51%, an increase in area under mangroves (71%), being offset by a decline in mudflats (73%), lagoons (62%) and beaches (39%). Coastal human-made wetlands have increased by 619%, the maximum increase being in aquaculture ponds (2908%).

For vulnerability analysis, the scale of biogeographic zones was used, and data constructed for qualitative analysis using over 300 published papers and reports. The vulnerability assessment indicates that the natural wetlands located in Trans-Himalayas, Himalayas, Desert, Coasts and Islands are most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Wetlands in Semi-arid and Indo-Gangetic plains biogeographic zones are moderately vulnerable. Wetlands of Deccan Peninsula, North-East and Western Ghats have low vulnerability to climatic changes.

The final technical report of the assessment will be published in November 2020, and will feed into our strategy and actions for promoting integration of wetlands in climate change.

Developing climate scenarios for Chilika

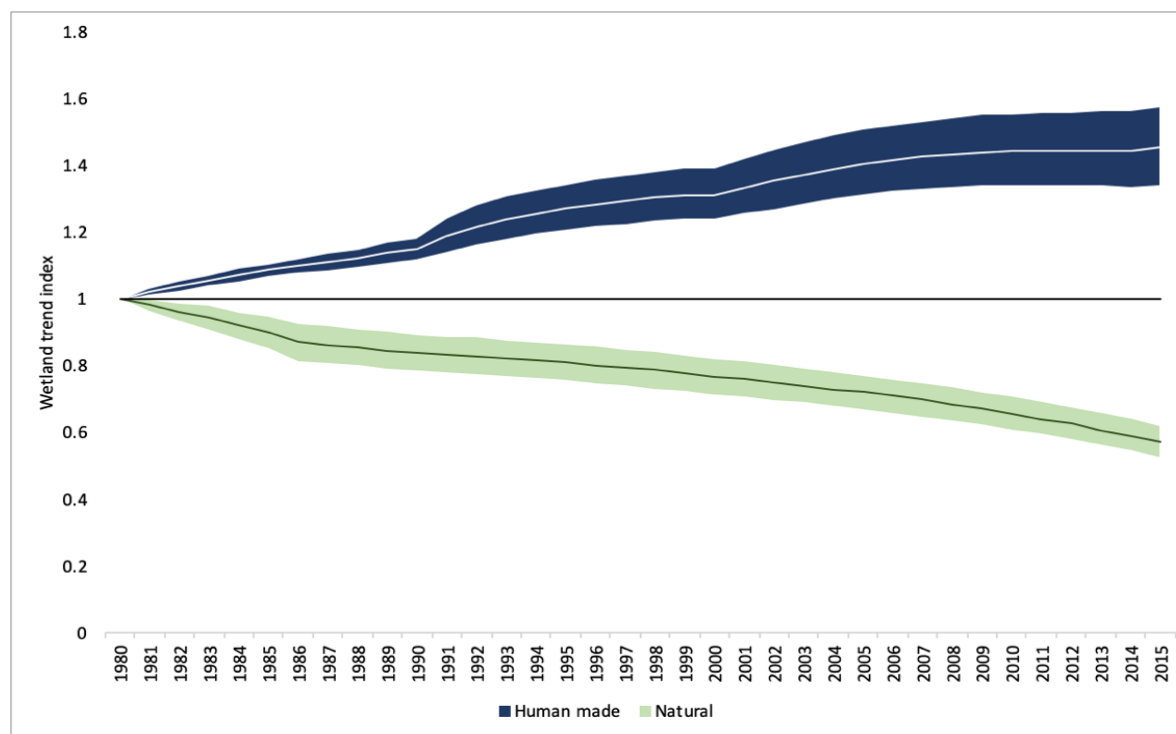
Hydrological Flows of Chilika were modelled for two climate scenarios namely

Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 4.5 and 8.5 climate models.

Analysis of climatic parameters indicate a declining rainfall, as well as increase in maximum and minimum temperatures for the Chilika basin.

The models also indicate an increasing probability of extreme precipitation events, namely floods and droughts. Freshwater inflows into the lagoon (the components

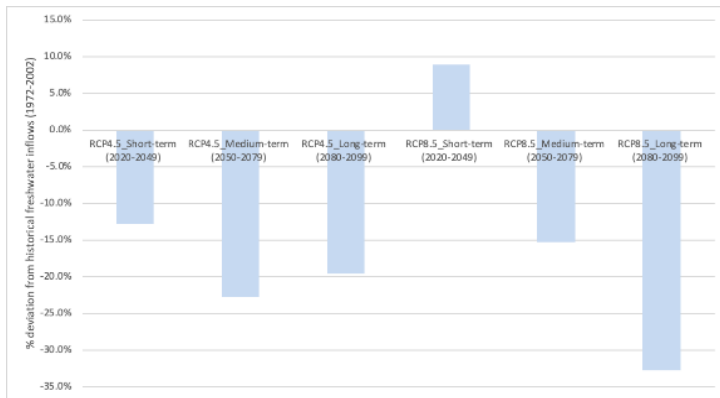
received from Mahanadi River distributaries, runoff from western catchments and rainfall) are also projected to decline. There is only one scenario (RCP 8.5 for short term, 2020-2049) period which indicates a net increase in annual freshwater inflows.



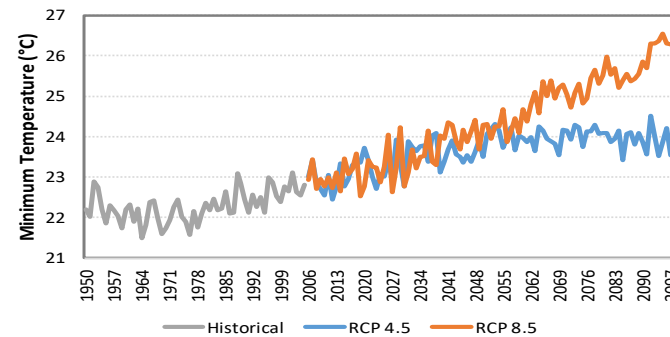
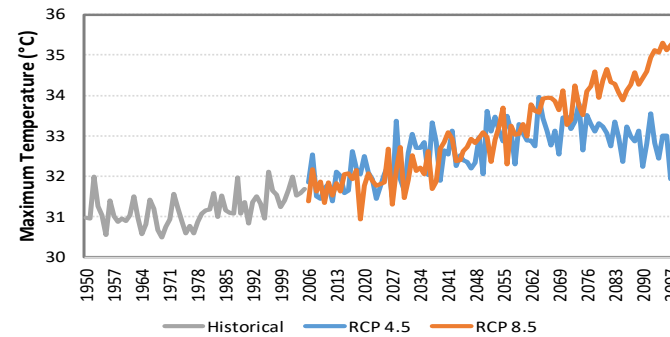
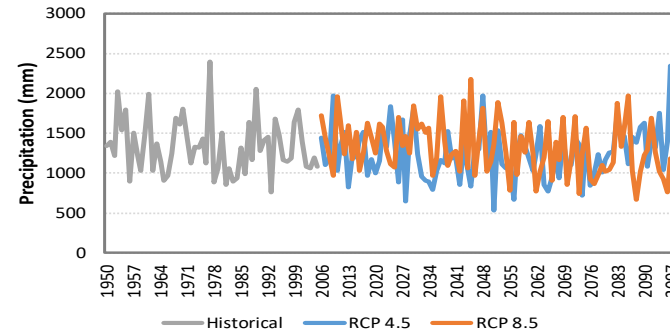
A Wetland Extent trends index for India

Changes in freshwater inflows have a direct consequence for salinity regimes. The modelled outcomes indicate increasing salinity levels in non-monsoon seasons for all sectors, while monsoon flushing effect being maintained.

In 2020, the outcomes will be finalized with specific recommendations for Chilika management.



Modelled trends in freshwater inflows into Chilika for RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5 Scenarios



Modelled trends in climatic parameters for Chilika direct basin for RCP 4.5 and RCP8.5 Scenarios



Mapping peat extent in Chandra Basin, Himachal Pradesh

Conserving High-Altitude Himalayan Wetlands

Highlights

- Completed ecological character description of 2 high altitude Himalayan wetlands
- Mapped extent of shallow peat in Chandra Basin

Workstreams

Healthy wetlands nature, Replenished water stores from mountain to sea

Partners

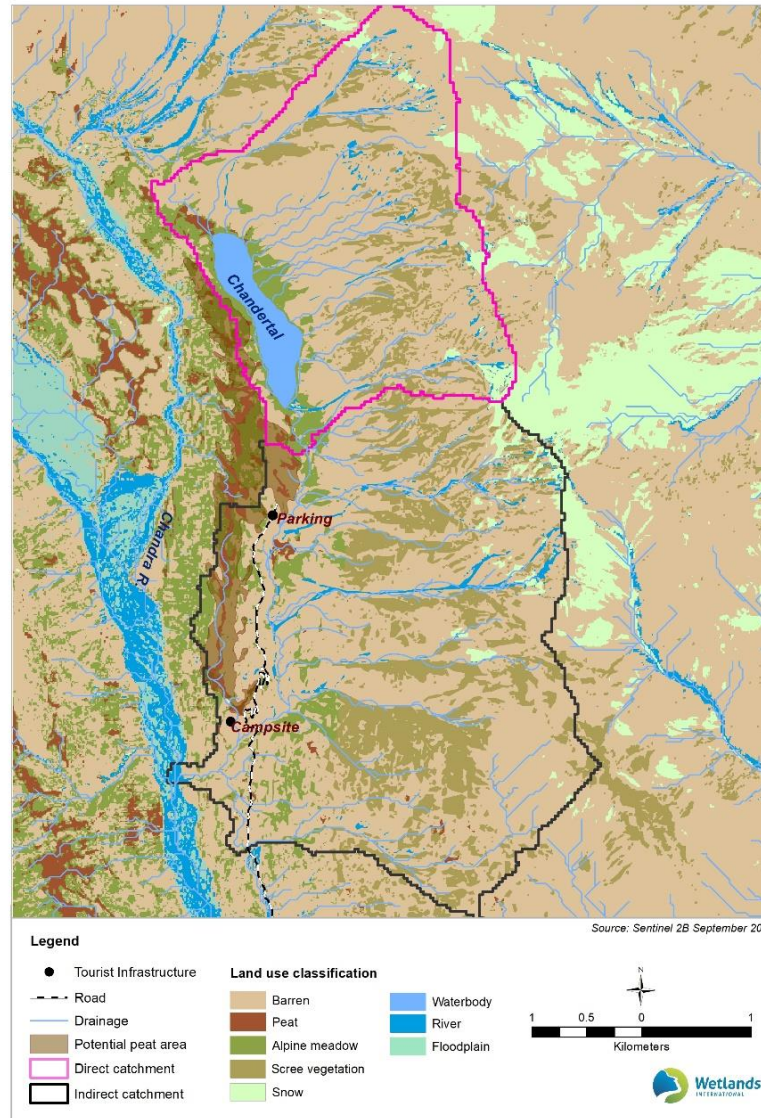
UNDP-India, State Wetlands Authority of Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh

The UNDP-GEF Secure Himalayas project in priority landscapes of Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand aims to support the Government of India and State Governments to effectively promote sustainable land and forest management in alpine pastures and forests in high range Indian Himalayan ecosystems that secure sustainable livelihoods and ensures conservation of globally significant biodiversity and threatened species. Integrated management of wetlands have been included within the range of interventions being undertaken within the project framework. Wetlands International South Asia is entrusted with development of model management planning frameworks for two priority wetlands: Chandertal in Himachal Pradesh and Gurudongmar in Sikkim.

During the year, we completed the ecological character description of the two wetlands using data from field and secondary data from published sources and various state government departments.

In Chandertal basin, presence of shallow peat bogs was recorded during fieldwork. These were assessed for carbon stocks and depth profile based on methodology suggested by Ramsar. Sampling in two clusters indicated the depth to range from 0.1m to 1m. Based on soil sample analysis, it is estimated that the carbon stock in the examined peat locations can range from 17-120 kg/m³. Notably, the presence of peat bogs in the Chandertal peat trench region has also been reported in some recent paleological studies conducted by Birbal Sahni Institute.

The result of the assessment were presented during a session on high altitude wetlands organized by G B Pant Institute on December 10, 2019 on the International Mountain Day, 2019. In the coming year, the management plans will be completed and submitted to the concerned State Wetlands Authorities for implementation. We will continue to engage with the Himalayan States for conservation of HAW for water and climate security.



Peatlands in Chandra Basin



Peatlands in Chandra Basin



Wetlands International South Asia partners conducted 20 outreach workshops on wetlands

Local action for integrating wetlands in disaster risk and water security planning

Highlights

- Supported integration of wetlands rejuvenation interventions in development plans of 50+ Gram Panchayats
- Partners conducted 20 outreach workshops on role of wetlands in securing water and reducing water-mediated risks reaching out to 21,000 people

Workstreams

Vibrant coasts and deltas, Replenished water stores from mountain to sea

Partners

Indian Red Cross, IRC, Akvo-India, Unnati (Gujarat), Netcoast and Gram Utthan (Odisha), SEEDS and NIDAN (Bihar), DORP (Bhola Sadar Upzila, Bangladesh)

Wetlands International South Asia is implementing two Strategic Partnership Programmes, Partners for Resilience and Watershed, which aim at developing civil society capacity to engage in local development agendas, building community resilience. Our interventions under these partnerships are structured at promoting consideration of wetlands rejuvenation within local developmental planning processes as means to achieve water security and buffer water-mediated risks.

Enabling community action for wetlands rejuvenation in Saharsa, North Bihar

Under the aegis of Partners for Resilience initiative, Wetlands International South Asia is

working with SEEDS in Saharsa District to catalyze community led wetlands management as a means of building resilience to water-mediated disaster risks. The Partners for Resilience (PfR) alliance was launched in 2010 and continues its work under the strategic partnership with the Netherlands government (2016-2020) and the Eco-DRR programme in partnership with UNEP (2018-2021). The alliance was founded by five Netherlands based organisations: Cordaid, CARE Netherlands, Wetlands International, The Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and the Netherlands Red Cross and contributes to the resilience of communities by integrating climate change adaptation (CCA) and ecosystem management and restoration (EMR) into Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).



Communities of Saharsa formed a human chain to showcase the importance of wetlands

The wetlands of Saharsa act as the natural buffers of the landscape – absorbing excess rain and river overflows during the monsoon months and discharging the same during dry months to meet the irrigation needs of the communities. The fertile soils of the floodplains and availability of freshwater enables communities to sustain livelihoods based on agriculture and fisheries, and supplemented by cultivation of wetland plants such as fox nuts.

Wetlands of Saharsa have deteriorated over time due to reduced connectivity with the river

and intensification of land use. These changes have made a flood-dependent community flood vulnerable as the landscape remains waterlogged for prolonged periods, and water scarce in summer.

We have been working with SEEDS in this landscape to build coping capabilities of communities by: improving community capacity to assess local water contexts and understand vulnerabilities; monitor wetlands and prepare for extreme hydrological events; and including wetland restoration as a response to risk of floods and drought within developmental planning.

In 2018, a map of wetlands of the district was prepared. Surveys were conducted to collect information on the condition of wetlands, current use, ownership and threats. During October - December 2019, 21 task forces were formed, with 12 members each to raise awareness amongst community members on the value of wetlands, and enlist support for actions for rejuvenating wetlands within the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs). In January 2019, a training on wetlands management was conducted for key Panchayat functionaries and task force members.

The results of the mapping exercise and risk assessments were shared with the district administration and with the Bihar State Disaster Management Authority. Proactive engagement with district administration led to

allocation of Rs. 68 million by the Department of Water Resources for rejuvenation of wetlands and streams of the District. The funds will be used to clear the wetland inlets and outlets, and remove invasive species, and selective dredging to improve water holding capacity.

In 2019, the Government of Bihar has launched the three-year Jal-Jeevan Hariyali Mission to restore water resources and improve environment. SEEDS has used the mission to promote awareness on role of wetlands for water security. On January 19, 2020, the local partners organized a human-chain with over 17,000 people around a wetland, pledging support to prevent their degradation and participate in wetlands conservation measures.

In 2020, as the engagement under PFR will draw to a close, the partners will work towards further building of community institutions to monitor wetlands and prevent their degradation. Affirmative actions will be made part of GPDPs, and implemented with the financial support leveraged from various rural development schemes.

Building capacity for community led water security planning in Bhola

Wetlands International South Asia in collaboration with DORP (Development Organisation of the Rural Poor), a development NGO has undertaken a systematic water security planning process to

ensure safe water for sustainable WASH in Bhola Sadar Upazila, a sub-district of Bhola, the largest Island of Bangladesh situated at the mouth of Meghna River. The work is done under the aegis of Watershed partnership programme which aims at empowering citizens to lobby and advocacy at local level for sustainable WASH services.

The mainstay of livelihood of Bhola is agriculture which was initially dependent on plentiful of freshwater available in the northern and central part of the island. The wetlands, locally known as pukhur (ponds) and khal (natural channels) provided the means for storing freshwater, primarily from rainfall which is used for various human and ecological usages. Post-1970s, as technologies to tap deep water aquifers became available with the government agencies, the significance of wetlands in water security reduced. Unplanned expansion of WASH infrastructure led to wetlands being highly polluted. The depth at which water for drinking and domestic use is tapped is presently in excess of 1,000 feet.

The aquifer that runs from north of Bangladesh to south east of Bangladesh serves approximately 60 million people. With drawdown surpassing the recharge capacity of groundwater by exceedingly high rates, the declining water table threatens the renewability of the aquifer leading to serious issues of water mediated risks to Bhola and other parts of the country like Dhaka.

In this backdrop, conjunctive use of surface water and groundwater for sustainable WASH is identified as an advocacy agenda.

During this year a baseline assessment was undertaken to develop a model water security plan for Vedurua Union, one of the 13 Unions of Bhola Sadar to ensure:

- Water for drinking and human wellbeing is available on a sustainable basis.
- Healthy wetlands support water, food and climate security and sustain livelihoods.
- Sufficient water is available to support agriculture, fisheries and other economic activities.
- Resiliency of communities to water related hazards such as floods and storm surges.

The process involved building capacity of the local CSOs and community and developing a knowledgebase to implement sustainable practices to ensure wetland conservation for sustainable WASH and water security. CSOs and community members were trained to map the wetlands in Vedurua union and record the values and threats associated with them. A training workshop co-conducted by Wetlands International South Asia, Akvo and DORP introduced the CSOs to water quality assessing of pukhur and groundwater in Vedurua to enable local CSOs and community monitor key parameters to understand the status and health of their water sources.



CSOs of Bhola learning how to conduct water quality test

A water security plan was drafted for Vedurua Union which addresses key water risks using wetland solutions. The plan was endorsed by Vedurua Union Parishad which committed allocate budget and implement the various interventions listed. The scheme of water security planning process was upscaled to all 13 unions of Bhola Sadar Upazila and Ramgati Upazila of the Noakhali sub district.

Over the next year the program aims at finalizing the water security plan for Vedurua Union and implement the actions proposed. The programme aims to achieve built capacity of CSOs and communities at Bhola to uptake similar process of ensuring water security to

mediate water risks to other Unions and Bhola Sadar and beyond.

Rejuvenating wetlands for water resilience in Kachchh, Gujarat

Wetlands International South Asia with its partner, Unnati, is working on rejuvenating wetlands to build water resilience in Bhachau Block of Kachchh District of Gujarat.

The block inhabited by 70 villages is sandwiched between Greater Rann (desert) of Kachchh (the largest saline wetland in India) in the north, Banni grasslands on the west, the Little Rann of Kachchh in the south east and the inter tidal flats of Gulf Kachchh in the south. The importance of coastal wetlands such as mangroves, intertidal mudflats remains immensely for the livelihoods of the communities, producing 30% of country inland salt and export of ginger prawn. The region by its inherent nature undergoes a prolonged dry spell. The freshwater wetlands (in the form of village ponds, earthen dams, stepwells) ensure water security, adequately capturing and recharging ground water during the dry spells. The livelihood systems in the region are primarily livestock and agriculture based with high seasonal migration to escape the vagaries of extreme weather.

With the advent of diesel pumps in the 70s, spread of which has been promoted by energy subsidies, and supply of Narmada Canal water since 2001, the relevance of wetlands as a

water source for irrigation and drinking water has dipped in the region. However, as the extremes events such a prolonged drought are becoming more frequent, the value of wetlands in ensuring water resilience is being realized. In 2019, a baseline assessment was carried out to understand current condition of wetlands, their management and ownership, major trends in last two decades, and threats. The participatory assessment was also an opportunity for the communities to reflect on the relevance of wetlands. In November 2019, two rounds of training workshops were conducted for the Panchayat functionaries and local government officials on preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans, and opportunities for linking wetlands rejuvenation within these plans. Using the results from the survey, 13 wetlands were prioritized and actions identified for their rejuvenation (such as cleaning inlets and outlets, strengthening embankments, clearing solid waste and revegetating the catchments with native species). These activities were embedded within the 10 Gram Panchayat Development Plans. In Kathankot Gram Panchayat, work was initiated with Rs. 4.8 million received by the Panchayat for implementing the interventions. Wetland restoration in Kathankot will support drinking water to five Gram Panchayat.

A five-day awareness campaign was also organized in Bhachau in December, 2019, which reached out to 900 hundred including 200 women and 500 children.

Embedding wetlands in water security and development planning in Tampara, Odisha and Debkhal Chaur, Bihar

Tampara, a coastal wetland in Odisha and Debkhal, a marsh in Bihar are two pilot sites wherein Wetlands International South Asia is working with local partners Gram Utthan, Netcoast and Nidan to link wetlands conservation with planning for water, sanitation and health (WASH). The work is supported under Watershed India programme.

The detailed survey of WASH status and participatory groundwater mapping in the basin of Tampara was brought to fruition in the form of village level water security plans being finalized and placed for adoption in respective Gram Sabha meetings. A beginning was made this year, with the water security plan of Kanamana Panchayat being adopted in the Gram Sabha held on 15 August 2019.

Capacitated communities are increasingly holding service providers responsible for quality of water supplied through the water points. This was the case in Tikria Berhampur wherein the communities now demand regular testing of their water sources for fluoride and chloride contamination, when high levels were detected in the surveys of dugwells conducted under the project in 2018. Similarly, communities of Panchayat Bhagwanpur Kamla, Samastipur asked for realignment of village drainage lines by using drainage maps prepared under the project in 2018.

The detailed geohydrological assessments in the basins of Tampara and Debkhal have brought out the crucial role of wetlands in ensuring surface and ground water availability, and in the case of former, preventing salinity ingress. The data has been used to identify interventions within the catchments to ensure that these wetlands continue to function. The interventions are mapped with Gram Panchayat Development Plans, and once approved will be implemented with funds leveraged from rural development schemes. The partners will continue to provide handholding support to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in implementing these interventions.



Communities coming together to remove water hyacinth and clear inlets of Harishankhini Jheel in Saharsa



WISA staff training Forest Department officials on wetlands assessment at a wetland in Sarnath Deer Park, Varanasi

Strengthening wetlands management

Highlights

- *As knowledge partner of the MoEFCC, supported roll-out of 100 wetlands programme under 169 transformative ideas of Government of India*
- *Conducted 10 technical workshops on wetlands assessment for frontline staff*
- *Developed a toolkit on Wetlands Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring*

Workstreams

Healthy wetlands nature, Vibrant coasts and deltas, Replenished water stores from mountain to sea

Partners

Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority, Delhi State Wetlands Authority, Kerala State Wetlands Authority, Bihar State Wetlands Authority

Wetlands International South Asia continued to work with the MoEFCC and State Wetlands Authorities to strengthen wetlands management.

Support to National Wetlands Programme

In August 2019, the MoEFCC launched the 100 wetlands rejuvenation as one of the transformative ideas of the government towards making the country water secure. The initiative is structured on a four-pronged approach, which includes creation of baseline information, constitution of citizen networks, ecosystem health assessment and formulation of integrated management plans will be adopted for the initiative. Wetlands International South Asia, as a knowledge partner to the initiative, worked closely on developing the concept and providing handholding support to state governments in

implementing the programme. In 100 days, the programme covered 130 wetlands, wherein baseline information was compiled; biodiversity, ecosystem services and threats assessed and framework management plans prepared. Thirty-three wetlands, which had high threat and low ecosystem health scores have been identified by the MoEFCC for rejuvenation on a priority. The programme has since been rolled out in all districts of the country, engaging a wider network of knowledge partners. We have continued providing support to implementation of the initiative.

Conserving floodplain wetlands of river Ganga in Uttar Pradesh

River Ganga flows through 27 Districts of Uttar Pradesh covering a distance of 1140km at its entry point at Kotwali in Bijnor District

and exit at Dokti in Ghazipur District. The floodplain wetlands flanking the main channel provide an ecological and hydrological continuum rendering vital ecosystem services and biodiversity habitats. Effective management of these wetlands is crucial for achieving river integrity, and food and water security for the dependent communities.

In 2019, in collaboration with Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority and financial support of National Mission on Clean Ganga, Wetlands International South Asia launched a one-year project on assessment of floodplain wetlands and designing management interventions which would rejuvenate wetland ecosystem health and benefit river flows. The project entails development of functional inventory of floodplain wetlands of River Ganga, an ecosystem services assessment, and formulation of framework management plans for prioritized wetlands.

In February-March 2020, four field training workshops for frontline state forest department officials were held at Meerut, Prayagraj, Varanasi and Badaun for collecting baseline information on wetlands.

Tool for Wetland Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring

Systematic inventory, assessment and monitoring of wetlands is crucial for designing effective management interventions. Under the IKI project, Wetlands International South Asia and GIZ-India, with support of experts and wetlands managers, developed a tool for wetlands inventory, assessment and monitoring.

Parameters which needed to be inventoried, assessed and monitored for different wetland features (extent, catchment, hydrology, biodiversity and ecosystem services, livelihoods, and institutions and governance) were identified in an expert consultation meeting held in July 2019. The parameters were further filtered in terms of their relevance for integrated management, practicality, cost-effectiveness, time and resource availability. For each essential parameter, indicators have been identified, alongwith key guiding questions and additional references. The tool was launched at a side-event at the CMS CoP 13 meeting held in February 2020.

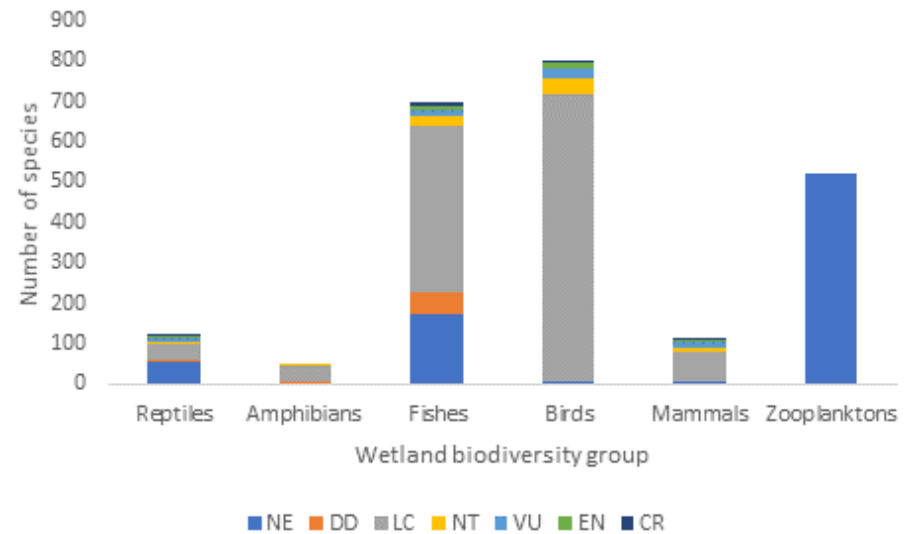
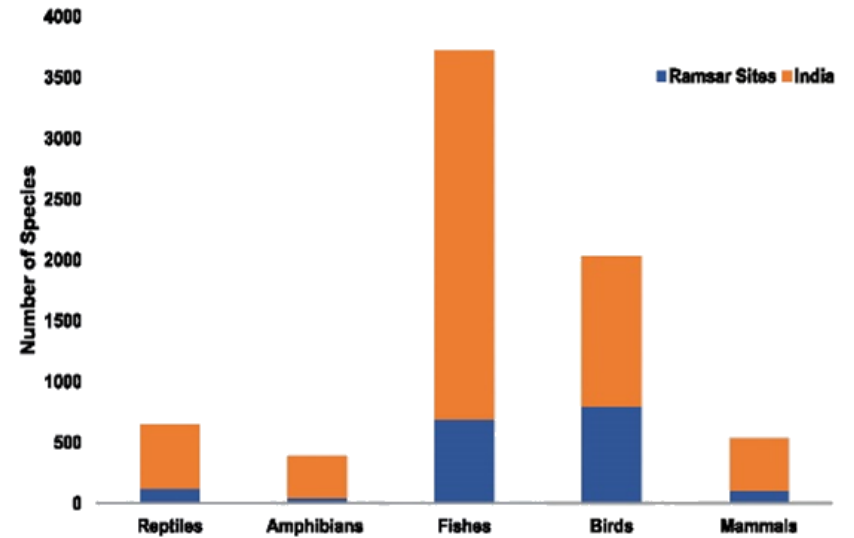
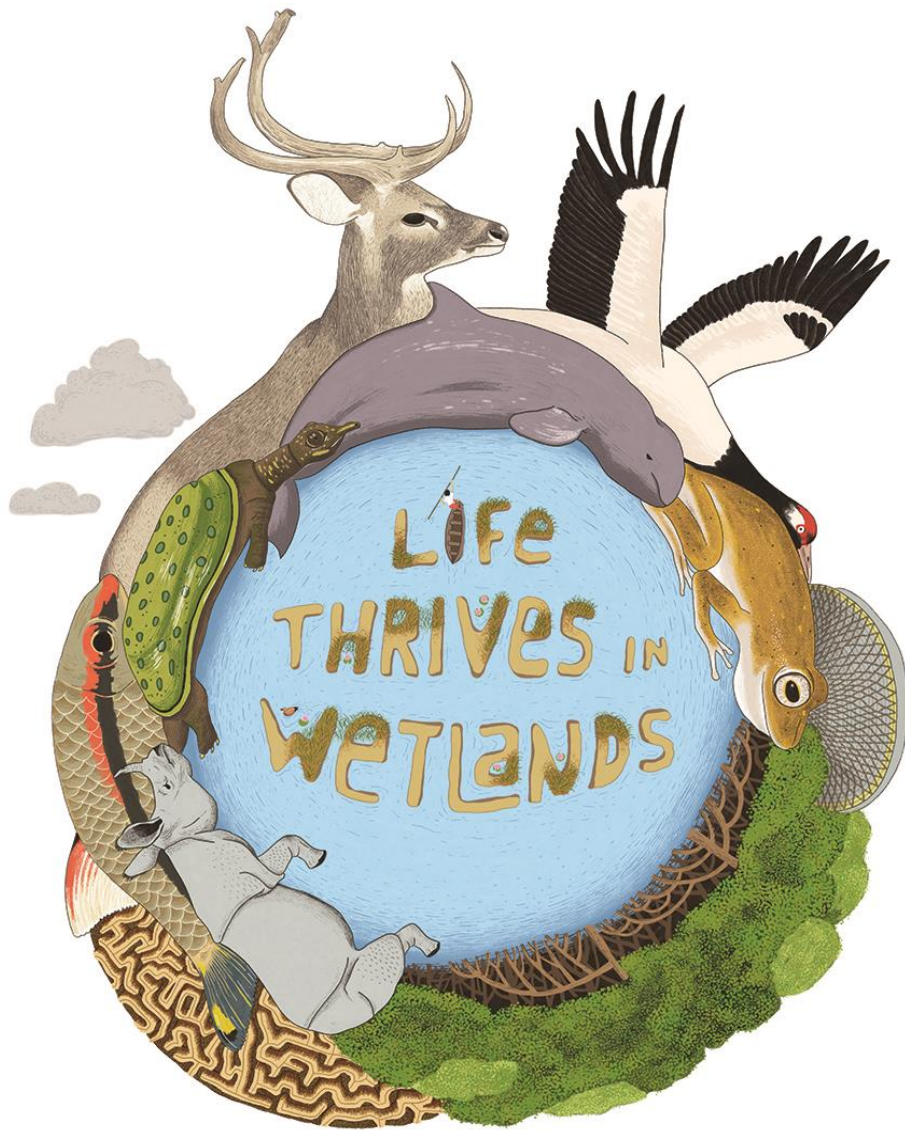
Support to states

At the request of Delhi State Wetlands Authority, Wetlands International South Asia

conducted an orientation programme on November 22, 2019 for the various line departments and agencies on conducting baseline assessments of wetlands and formulation of integrated management plans. Assistance has also been provided to finalization of brief documents on wetlands – being prepared in compliance with the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017. The organization will continue working with the Delhi State Wetlands Authority and the Delhi Development Authority for rejuvenation of three wetlands prioritized by the state government.

The Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority has enlisted Wetlands International South Asia as its knowledge partner to support design and implementation of wetland related programmes of the state.

Engagement with Bihar State Wetlands Authority and State Wetlands Authority Kerala was continued during the year, with focus on implementation of management action plans prepared by Wetlands International South Asia in previous years.



An inventory of wetland biota of 27 Ramsar sites collated by Wetlands International South Asia



Wetlands International South Asia assisted Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority in preparation of Ramsar Site designation proposal for 6 wetlands (Photo of Sandi in Hardoi District)

Engagement with Conventions and Global Platforms

Highlights

- Designated as Ramsar CEPA NGO Focal Point of the MoEFCC
- Supported designation of 6 Ramsar Sites
- Contributed to National Action Plan for implementation of CAF
- Held sessions on wetlands at International Conference of Wetlands and Flyways
- Pitched for recognition of role of wetlands as ecosystem-based DRR at GPDRR

Workstreams

Vibrant coasts and deltas, Replenished water stores from mountain to sea

Partners

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority

Wetlands International South Asia was designated as the NGO Focal Point for Ramsar Convention by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. In this role, the organization is expected to work with the MoEFCC to support communication and outreach related to wetlands and implementation of Convention in the country.

We assisted the Uttar Pradesh State Wetlands Authority (UPSWA) in preparation of Ramsar Site Designation proposals for 6 wetlands (Nawabganj, Saman, Sarsai Nawar, Sandi, Samaspur and Parvati Arga). These wetlands were formally designated on February 2, 2020, increasing the number of Ramsar Sites in the country to 37.

A meeting of knowledge partners of the MoEFCC with the Ramsar Secretary General, Ms Martha Urrego was held on February 16,

2020, in which we were represented by the Director. A compilation of factsheets on Indian Ramsar Sites, jointly developed by the knowledge partners was released at the occasion. The proposal to develop a South Asia Ramsar Regional Initiative was discussed at the meeting, so that wetlands managers could exchange best practices and lessons, as well develop capacity for implementing Ramsar Convention commitments.

We continued to engage with state governments in ensuring that the designated Ramsar Sites are managed on the basis of wise use plans. At the request of East Kolkata Wetlands Management Authority, we have taken up updation of the management plan for East Kolkata Wetlands for 2020-2025, which will be completed by September 2020.

Convention on Migratory Species

Wetlands International South Asia was included by the MoEFCC in the drafting committee of the National Action Plan for Conservation of Migratory Species in the Central Asian Flyway. The action plan was launched by the MoEFCC in December 2018, and included within the commitments conveyed by the Government of India at the 13th meeting of the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Migratory Species held during February 15-22, 2020 at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

We took active part in the deliberations on Central Asian Flyway which were concluded at the Conference of Parties Meeting in the form of a specific resolution wherein India will be working with the flyway range countries to implement the commitments under the Action Plan. Post CoP, we are working with Wildlife Institute of India and Bombay Natural History Society in developing an institutional structure for hosting the Central Asian Flyway Secretariat in India.

International Conference on Wetlands and Migratory Birds of the Asian Flyway

Wetlands International South Asia actively participated in the international conference on wetlands and migratory waterbirds of the Asian Flyways organized by the Bombay Natural History Society during November 18-22, 2019 at Lonavala, Maharashtra. The conference intended to provide a common meeting ground

for scientists, conservationists, managers, and students to share information and assess the current status of the wetlands and migratory waterbirds occurring along the Asian flyways, namely African-Eurasian Flyway, East Asian-Australasian Flyway, and especially the Central Asian Flyway.

In order to bring focus on wetland management issues, a specific side-event on 'integrated management of wetlands: opportunities and challenges' was organized on November 21, 2019. Setting the scene, Dr Sidharth Kaul (President, Wetlands International South Asia) marked the journey of establishing a national wetlands programme, and the challenges thereof. Dr Asad Rahmani (Member, Governing Body, Wetlands International South Asia) reflected on several flawed assumptions made in wetlands management in the country, leading to deleterious impacts. Key amongst those was altering wetlands natural regimes to ensure water permanence, and preventing beneficial hydrological shocks due to periodic drying. Mr Suresh Babu (Director, River and Wetlands Programme, WWF-India) discussed several case studies wherein water security interventions by not recognizing the role of natural wetlands, had actually made the landscape water insecure. Dr Ritesh Kumar (Director, Wetlands International South Asia) brought to fore the challenges in bridging languages while conveying the value of wetlands for societal well-being.

At close, the panel concluded that integrated management of wetlands would require greater inter-sectoral collaboration and hybrid approaches, which cater for societal well-being while not compromising the ecosystem services and biodiversity values of these fragile ecosystems.

Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is a biennial multi-stakeholder forum established by the UN General Assembly to review progress, share knowledge and discuss the latest developments and trends in reducing disaster risk. The platform is a critical component of the monitoring and implementation process of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).

The May 2019 meeting of the Platform held at Geneva, Switzerland had a focus on building resilience to disaster risks - a theme which is supported by Partners for Resilience Strategic Partnership implemented in India amongst 9 countries. Mr Dushyant Mohil (Programme Manager, Partners of Resilience) represented the India programme alongwith colleagues from Wetlands International network at the platform and took part in side events organized on ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction. Key lessons of our programs from Kerala and Odisha were shared to highlight the urgency to implement and upscale successful examples such as Building with Nature and integrate

ecosystems in DRR strategies and plans at national level. The Chair's concluding summary from GPDRR highlighted the need for integrating ecosystems and nature-based solutions in the national strategies and plans for DRR and resilience building.



Dr Sidharth Kaul (President, Wetlands International South Asia) speaking at side event on “Integrated Management of Wetlands: Opportunities and Challenges” at International Conference on Wetlands and Migratory Birds of the Asian Flyway



Mobilizing citizen science for waterbirds

Highlights

- *Launched the AWC 2006-2015 synthesis report*
- *Contributed to State of Indian Birds Assessment report*
- *AWC volunteers conducted waterbird census at 550+ wetlands*

Workstreams

Healthy wetlands nature

Partners

BNHS, Nature Conservation Foundation, AWC State Coordinators and Volunteer network

The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), a citizen-science initiative on waterbirds is part of the global International Waterbird Census (IWC). Initiated in 1987, the census is the longest running citizen-science programme providing information on status of waterbirds and wetlands. Information collected in the census is used to develop global and flyway scale population estimates, and is used as a conservation tool, especially for designating and managing wetlands of international importance under Ramsar Convention and flyway networks. The AWC is jointly coordinated in India by Wetlands International South Asia and Bombay Natural History Society, and supported by Wetlands International Global Office. Sixty-thousand wetland sites have been counted in 184 countries since the IWC started in 1967.

Launch of 2006-2015 Synthesis Report

Wetlands International South Asia launched the Asian Waterbird Census 2006-2015 Synthesis Report on 18 February 2020 at the 13th Conference of Parties meeting of the Convention on Migratory Species.

During 2006-2015, over 1400 volunteers conducted waterbird counts at 1409 wetlands of 23 States and 3 Union Territories in India. The Asian Waterbird Census recorded presence of 170 waterbird species (85% of total waterbird species in India), including 142 migratory species (84% of total migratory waterbird species in the country) from 1409 wetlands (0.2% of the total number of wetlands in the country).

Two hundred seventy-two wetlands support 1% or more of the bio-geographic population of at least one species of waterbird and qualify as Wetlands of International Importance under criterion 6 of Ramsar Convention.

Sixty-five wetlands supported 20,000 or more waterbirds during at least one year of the assessment period. These sites qualify for designation as Wetlands of International Importance under criterion 5 of Ramsar Convention.

Five Ramsar sites which were counted at least five times during 2006-2015, the population of Cranes, Gulls, Terns and Indian Skimmer reported declining numbers especially for designating and managing wetlands of international importance under Ramsar Convention and providing input to AEWA, EAAFP and CMS.

One in every five waterbird species recorded in the census, for which population status is known, is globally threatened as per the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Of these, three are Critically Endangered (Baer's Pochard, Sociable Lapwing and Spoon-billed Sandpiper), three Endangered (Black-bellied Tern, Great Knot and Greater Adjutant), and eight Vulnerable (Andaman Teal, Common Pochard, Dalmatian Pelican, Indian Skimmer, Lesser Adjutant, Marbled Teal, Sarus Crane and Woolly-necked Stork). White-bellied Heron and Siberian Crane, two Critically Endangered

species, sighted during 1987-2005 period (from Assam and Rajasthan respectively) have not been reported by the AWC network in the current census.

The population of one in every four waterbird species recorded in the census, for which trends in the Central Asian Flyway are known, is declining. Out of thirty-three, 20 Threatened and Near Threatened waterbird species recorded during the census have a declining population trend. Reviews of population estimates and population trends of waterbirds, especially migratory waterbirds using the Central Asian Flyway, needs urgent attention as this information is outdated or is of poor quality.

These results highlight critically important information on the status of waterbirds and wetlands for the government and other stakeholders to strengthen management action at internationally and nationally important wetlands. Additionally, it informs prioritization of sites for designation of new Ramsar sites and under the Western/Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes and Other Waterbirds of the Convention on Migratory Species.

Census coverage for 2019

In 2019, more than 550 sites were reported for Asian Waterbird Census in India, through AWC (228) and eBird (nearly 350) submissions. These sites hosted more than 0.1

million individuals of 162 waterbirds species. The analysis shows Demoiselle Crane, Common Coot, Lesser Whistling Duck and Little Stint to be most abundant waterbird species in India during 2019 winter counts. The list also included thirty threatened species such as Black-bellied Tern, Common Pochard, Curlew Sandpiper and others. Largest waterbird congregations were noted in Mokarsagar Wetland Complex in Gujarat; Pulicat Lagoon in Andhra Pradesh; Harike Wildlife sanctuary in Punjab and Pong dam in Himachal Pradesh.

State of Indian Birds Report Consortium

Wetlands International South Asia partnered with Nature Conservation Foundation led consortium of 10 organisations to produce 'The State of India's Birds report' - the first comprehensive assessment of the distribution range, trends in abundance, and conservation status for most of the bird species that regularly occur in India.

Over 10 million observations on occurrence of 867 species of birds as reported by over 15,000 birdwatchers in the eBird-India platform were analysed to assess conservation status of species. Trends from long-term and current changes in reporting rates indicate that 52% of Indian avifauna show declining trends with 101 species classified as 'Species of High Conservation Concern'. These largely include raptors of open and semi-arid grasslands, migratory shorebirds, and habitat specialists -

particularly the Western Ghats endemics. On the other hand, species like Indian Peafowl, Glossy Ibis, and Ashy Prinia show increasing population trend across the country, while House Sparrow, much contrary to popular belief, seems to be more or less stable in the vast rural landscape of the country, registering a marked decline only in select metros. The report was formally released on February 17, 2020 by Mr C.K. Mishra, Secretary, MoEFCC at the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS-COP13) held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Strengthening AWC network

Wetlands International South Asia, in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society and the Wetlands International Global Office, convened Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) State Coordinators meeting at Lonavala, Maharashtra during November 23-24, 2019. The meeting aimed at reviewing of work done till date and identifying measures required for improvising processes of data collection, analysis & management. The meeting saw participation of coordinators from 14 states.

Mr D S Dadwal, Divisional Forest Officer, WL Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh Forest Department and Dr Rudraprasad Das, Member of the Executive Committee, Prakriti Samsad have been appointed as new AWC State Coordinators for Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal respectively.



Mr Rakesh Jagenia, DIG (Forests), MoEFCC and Dr Taej Mundkur (International Waterbird Census Coordinator, Wetlands International) launching the AWC Synthesis Report at CMS COP 13



Wetlands International South Asia Society General Body Members alongwith Guests of Honor at World Wetlands Day event

Celebrating World Wetlands Day 2020

To mark World Wetlands Day (Feb 2), Wetlands International South Asia organized a public seminar on “Wetlands and Biodiversity” at India International Centre, New Delhi. Pathways and policy directions for conserving wetlands biodiversity and mainstreaming with developmental planning were discussed at the seminar. The event was attended by 69 participants from central government agencies, International organizations, academia, civil society, media and experts.

Dr Sidharth Kaul (President, Wetlands International South Asia) delivered the welcome address and introduced the theme of the World Wetlands Day and the work being done by the organization to conserve and sustainably manage wetlands. The Chief Guest, Mr J.C. Kala (Former Secretary, Government of India) released the poster made by Wetlands International South Asia on the World Wetlands Day theme ‘Life thrives in wetlands’, and delivered the keynote address, calling for proactive and affirmative actions for conservation of wetlands for sustainable development.

Mr Suresh Prabhu, Hon’ble Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha and Government of India G7 and G20 Sherpa conveyed a poignant message to urgently step up action for wetlands conservation. In his video message, Mr Prabhu

highlighted the worsening water crisis as wetlands had been reclaimed and encroached upon in major Indian cities.

A panel discussion on pathways for conservation of wetlands biological diversity was also held. Dr Ritesh Kumar (Director, Wetlands International South Asia) presented an overview of the current measures taken by the Government of India for wetlands conservation, especially in compliance with the commitments under Ramsar Convention, Yet, the continuing loss and degradation of natural wetlands in the country, indicated a disjoint between the cause of conservation and the current development paradigm. Dr Kumar urged that wetlands loss is not seen as an esoteric cause of conserving species, but as a development crisis, given the increasing water, food and climate insecurity due to wetlands loss.

Mr. Hem Pande (Formerly Secretary, Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Special Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate called for a middle path in wetland conservation as strict nature conservation is not viable in most circumstances. Dr. Asad Rahmani (Member, Governing Body, Wetlands International South Asia and Formerly Director Bombay Natural History Society) called for attention to degrading wetland

quality and transformation due to various anthropogenic interventions. Dr. Anupam Joshi (Senior Environment Specialist, the World Bank) emphasized on bridging policy gaps and establishing a development connect for the environment sector.

The panel and the participants appreciated the efforts made by Wetlands International South Asia in promoting the cause of wetlands conservation and urged the organization to take practical and tangible steps to improve the status of wetlands by providing management oriented knowledgebase, building capacity of stakeholders and working for behavioural change.



Mr Suresh Prabhu, Hon’ble Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha connecting to the World Wetlands Day event via video message



12th Annual General Body Meeting in progress

Governance

Wetlands International South Asia is governed under a three-tier structure. At the apex is the General Body which provides strategic direction, guides policy making of the organization and elects the President. The overall management of the Society is vested in the Governing Body, which also appoints the Director. The Office Bearers (President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary) maintain an oversight of implementation of various decisions of the Society. Director serves as the head of Wetlands International South Asia Office and ex-office Secretary to the Society.

Annual General Body Meeting

The 12th Annual Meeting of the General Body was held on September 23, 2019 at Wetlands International South Asia office, and attended by 13 members (and 5 requests for leave of absence). The annual report and audited

financial statements for the period April 2018 – March 2019 were adopted at the meeting.

Meeting with Wetlands International Supervisory Council

The Wetlands International Supervisory Council met in India during November 27-28, 2019 at Cochin to review and approve the Global strategic intent. A joint meeting of Wetlands International South Asia Governing Body and Wetlands International Supervisory Council was held on November 27, 2019 to discuss the programme development in South Asia region and opportunities for scaling up action. A field visit to Poovur wetlands and developments around wetlands of Cochin was also conducted.

Meetings of the Governing Body

The fourteenth meeting of the Governing Body was held on August 12, 2019 at Wetlands

International South Asia office. Key decisions at the meeting were to develop a partnerships and networking strategy and conclude the Global Network Partnership Agreement between Wetlands International Foundation and South Asia Society.

The fifteenth meeting of the Governing Body was held on September 20, 2019 wherein the annual report and audited financial statements were approved for presentation at the Annual General Meeting.

Meeting of Office Bearers

The Office Bearers met seven times during April 2019 – March 2020 to assess implementation of decisions taken in various meetings of the Society, review technical programmes and prepare agenda for the meetings of Governing Body and General Body.

Financial Overview and Audited Statements

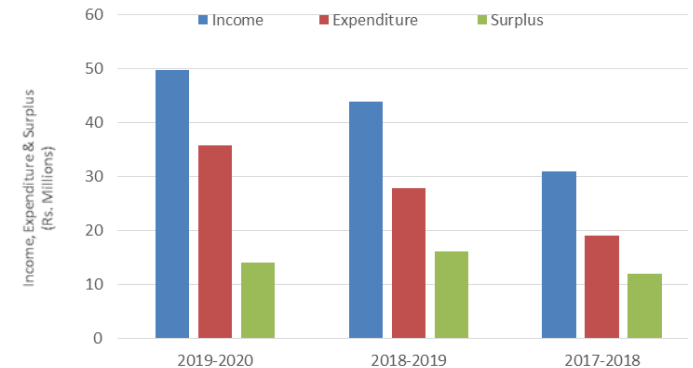
Wetlands International South Asia implements its various activities through funds generated from projects funded by international and national donor agencies. During April 2019 – March 2020, the total income accrued was Rs. 49.79 million. This included Rs. 43.96 million project funds received from 4 donor agencies, and the balance, Rs. 5.83 million as interest earned on the reserves.

The total expenditure incurred during the year towards various programmatic activities was Rs.35.81 million. Direct overheads stood at Rs. 3.33 million, forming 9.30% of total expenditure. Project expenses were Rs.22.42 million, including Rs.10.06 million towards

staff salary. A surplus of Rs.13.98 million was accrued during the year.

In comparison with the previous financial year, the project incomes increased by 12%. Overall, the expenses made under projects were fully covered by project incomes. The overheads were also well covered by the incomes accrued under staff time.

The total reserves at the end of the financial year stood at Rs. 70.77 million, which is an increase of Rs. 16.13 million over the last year. The interest income from reserves now matches up with nearly 60% of the salary costs.



B.P. Agrawal & Co.

Chartered Accountants

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²²[FORM NO. 10B

(See Rule 17B)

Audit report under section 12A(1)(b) of the Income-tax Act, 1961, in the case of charitable or religious trusts or institutions

[See rule 17B]

*I/ We have examined the Balance sheet of Wetlands International-South Asia Society Regd. (Pan No: AAATW1125E, A-25, 2nd Floor, Defence colony, New Delhi) as at 31-03-2020 and the Income and Expenditure account for the year ended on that date which are in agreement with the books of account maintained by the said trust or institution.

*I/ We have obtained all the information and explanations which to the best of *my/ our knowledge and belief were necessary for the purposes of the audit. In *my/ our opinion, proper books of account have been kept by the head office and the branches of the above named *trust/ institution visited by *me/ us so far as appears from *my/ our examination of the books, and proper returns adequate for the purposes of audit have been received from branches not visited by *me/ us, subject to the comments given below.

In *my/ our opinion and to the best of *my/ our information, and according to information given to *me/ us, the said accounts give a true and fair view-

- (i) in the case of the balance sheet, of the state of affairs of the above named *trust/ institution as at 31-3-2020, and
- (ii) in the case of the Income & Expenditure account, of the Surplus or Deficit of its accounting year ending on 31-3-2020

The prescribed particulars are annexed hereto.

For BP Agrawal & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 001210C



Place : New Delhi
Date : 07-09-2020

C.A. Rakesh Kumar Agarwal
Partner
MS No 095224

Notes:

1. *Strike out whichever is not applicable.
2. †This report has to be given by-
 - (i) a chartered accountant within the meaning of the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949 (38 of 1949); or
 - (ii) any person who, in relation to any State, is, by virtue of the provisions of sub-section (2) of section 226 of the Companies Act, 1956 (1 of 1956), entitled to be appointed to act as an auditor of the company registered in that State.
3. Where any of the matters stated in this report is answered in the negative, or with a qualification, the report shall state the reasons for the same.

Balance Sheet

Particulars	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Sources of Funds			
Capital Account	14,10,796	14,10,796	14,10,796
General Reserve			
Opening Balance	5,46,39,371	4,23,29,868	3,00,56,142
Add Transfer during the year	1,61,35,937	1,23,09,503	1,22,73,726
Closing Balance	7,07,75,308	5,46,39,371	4,23,29,868
Income & Expenditure Account			
Opening Balance	2,03,66,562	1,65,40,128	1,65,04,351
Add Surplus during the year	1,39,85,781	1,61,35,937	1,23,09,503
Less Transfer to General Reserve	(1,61,35,937)	(1,23,09,503)	(1,22,73,726)
Closing Balance	1,82,16,406	2,03,66,562	1,65,40,128
Current Liabilities	2,11,44,651	55,38,021	18,17,531
Total	11,51,47,160	8,19,54,750	6,20,98,323
Application of Funds			
Fixed Assets			
Opening Balance	8,97,438	8,53,508	9,73,362
Additions during the year	14,98,555	2,78,300	25,250
Less: Sale	(100,000)	(5,000)	-
Less: Depreciation	(3,80,022)	(2,29,370)	(1,45,104)
Closing Balance	19,15,971	8,97,438	8,53,508
Current Assets, Loans, Advances, Deposits & Cash balances	10,96,31,191	8,10,57,314	6,12,44,818
Rounding off Difference	-2	-2	-3
Total	11,15,47,160	8,19,54,750	6,20,98,323

Income and Expenditure Statement

Particulars	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Income			
Project Income	4,39,69,771	3,92,12,117	2,85,80,939
Other Income	58,29,017	47,22,567	29,19,405
Total	4,97,98,788	4,39,34,684	3,15,00,344
Expenditure			
Salary	1,00,67,214	68,96,670	58,10,401
Office running expenses	22,62,758	13,27,713	13,11,471
Governance expenses	6,89,013	3,31,597	1,67,754
Organisational Tax	-	-	59,695
Depreciation	3,80,022	2,29,370	1,45,104
Project Costs			
Sub-contractor/Project Grant	1,21,94,340	1,23,68,971	68,66,764
Travel Costs	14,16,893	12,48,071	5,11,465
Project Material	92,456	98,787	5,18,457
Communication	1,13,384	89,326	1,14,673
Financial Charges	11,53,433	(2,78,865)	1,00,369
Publications	11,03,940	7,20,064	4,43,001
Training/Workshops/Meetings	63,39,555	47,67,043	31,41,686
Total	3,58,13,008	2,77,98,747	1,91,90,841
Surplus During the period	1,39,85,780	1,61,35,37	1,23,09,503
Total	4,97,98,788	4,39,34,684	3,15,00,344

Outlook 2020 and beyond

Setting South Asia Regional Priorities and Targets for 2020-2030

In 2020, the Wetlands International network will adopt the Global Strategic Intent for 2020-2030, titled 'Wetlands for a Safer World'. Wetlands International South Asia will revise the South Asia regional strategy and define regional priorities and targets accordingly. The strategy will take into account national priorities and needs of wetlands conservation in South Asia. As a part of strategy development process, scanning of current scenario, issues, and key intervention priorities for Wetlands International South Asia has already been initiated on six topics – integrating wetlands in water management, wetlands and climate change, wetlands and urbanization, Himalayan wetlands, Conserving wetlands biological diversity and a national wetlands policy.

Establishing South Asia Platform for Wetlands Managers

The work on establishment of South Asia wetlands managers' platform will be pursued further. The second regional workshop will be held with financial support of Ramsar Regional Center East Asia.

Silver Jubilee celebrations

2021 will be the silver jubilee year of establishment of Wetlands International South Asia office. Events will be held throughout the year to mark the important occasion, and also strengthen existing partnerships, and build new ones.

Establishing a community led wetlands management programme

During 2020, the two long-term Strategic Partnership Projects funded by the Netherlands Government will draw to a close.

The projects have provided key insights on pathways for integrating wetlands in local development agendas related to WASH and DRR. Lessons and best practices from project implementation will be synthesized and used as a basis for developing a programme on community-led wetlands management.

Capacity development of wetlands managers

In 2020, a five-year Global Environment Facility funded project on 'Integrated Management of Wetlands Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' will be launched. The project will provide substantive opportunities for systematic capacity development on integrated management of wetlands in the country by engaging diverse stakeholders. Emphasis will be laid on instituting a training module on wetlands within the curriculum of Indian Forest Service Probationers at Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy.

Knowledge products on key wetlands issues such as wetlands and climate change, and wetlands governance will be produced. Specific attention will be placed on improving communication and outreach through various channels.

Expanding Governing Body membership

The Governing Body, in which the management of Wetlands International South Asia is vested, will be expanded, bringing in

diversity of skills, gender and expertise. A membership strategy for diversifying presence and increasing representativeness of organization's voice will be formulated and implemented. These changes will be crucial in strengthening governance and making it more strategic in nature.

Organizational Development

A human resources development plan has also been developed in 2019, defining skill-sets,

desired experience and functions for each position. The staff strength will be further increased on the basis of human resources plan to enable effective implementation of organization's strategy. Measures for improving project management processes and managing human resources will also be implemented as part of organizational development plan.

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Ridhi Saluja and Dushyant Mohil (2020) in
Shalini Dhyani et al (Ed). Nature-based
Solutions for Resilient Ecosystems and
Societies. Springer, Singapore

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