

# India lost 2 out of 5 wetlands in last 3 decades, say experts

## '40% Of Water Bodies Lost Quality For Survival Of Aquatic Animals'

Keshav Agarwal &  
Sandeep Rai | TNN

**Pilibhit:** The increasingly rapid pace at which wetlands in the country are disappearing has set alarm bells ringing in the conservation circles. Nearly two of every five wetlands in India have lost their natural existence in the last 30 years while 40% of water bodies have lost quality for survival of the aquatic animals, according to estimates by Wetlands International (WI), a not-for-profit global organisation based in the Netherlands, which works to sustain and restore wetlands and their resources for people and biodiversity.

"Najafgarh lake near Delhi and Pallikaranai in Chennai are prominent examples of rapidly drying water sources as these have so far shrunk by over 50% due to massive infrastructural development, expansion of housing plans and exploitation of water without alternative strategy," said Ritesh Kumar, South Asia head of WI while speaking at an event on wetlands



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conservation in UP's Pilibhit.

India presently has around 2.2 lakh big wetlands covering over 2.2 hectares and 5.5 lakh smaller ones. Of these, nearly 60,000 big wetlands are situated inside protected forest areas which could be deemed as safe. Of the remaining, conservation work has been carried out on 150 to 200 water bodies so far and maximum efforts were applied to a few star wetlands like Dal Lake in Srinagar and Harike wetland in Punjab.

Urging that the loss and degradation of wetlands

shouldn't be seen as an esoteric cause, but rather as a development crisis, Kumar said, "There is a need to understand that when a wetland is destroyed, the whole system begins to collapse. A case in point is 2015 Chennai floods. Degeneration of the city's wetlands due to unplanned development compromised its resilience to floods. Consequently, the auto industry had to be shut down temporarily for 10 days, leading to a loss of Rs 10,000 crore which adversely affected the stock market."

In addition to urbanisa-

tion, lack of knowledge on wetlands and their ecosystem is another reason for the widespread loss. As per experts, awareness and community mobilisation is the right way ahead. "Most wetlands eventually end up being abused as sites of waste disposal. It's high time that competent agencies reclaim these lands and make the masses aware of their importance while maintaining their originality," said ornithologist and senior scientist at Bombay Natural History Society, Rajat Bhargava.

When queried about solutions to the current crisis, Kumar said it is essential to secure existing wetlands under provisions of law and impose total prohibition on the alteration of the natural inflow and outflow of water bodies.

At present, the ministry of environment, forest and climate change has notified wetlands (conservation and management) rules, 2017, under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, as the regulatory framework for conservation and management of wetlands in India.