



Media and Outreach Partners

Wetlands International South Asia Curtain Raiser

World Wetlands Day, February 2, 2021 (Virtual Event)

Healthy wetlands can reduce water stress – provided we conserve and sustainably manage these kidneys of landscape. Forging ‘natural infrastructure’ of wetlands with the conventional ‘physical infrastructure’ of water resources can bring multiple advantages to the water sector.

2nd February is celebrated worldwide as World Wetlands Day. The Convention on Wetlands was adopted on this date in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. Popularly known as the Ramsar Convention, this intergovernmental treaty has 171 nations as its Contracting Parties. India is a party to the Convention since 1982. With 42 wetlands designated to the List of Wetlands of International Importance, India’s network of Ramsar Sites is the largest in South Asia, and next only to China in Asia.

The World Wetlands Day theme for 2021 is ‘Wetlands and Water’ which seeks to spread awareness on the inseparability of wetlands and water management. Wetlands, in their various occurrence, forms and characteristics, play an important role in the functioning of the water cycle. As water moves through the surface or underground, it passes through wetlands, which in turn regulate the quantity, quality and reliability of water. Wetlands provide vital water-related ecosystem services at different scales (for example clean water provision, wastewater treatment, groundwater replenishment) and thereby offer significant opportunities to address water management objectives with sustainable, and in several instances, cost-effective solutions. The ecosystem services of wetlands can also complement human-made infrastructure to deliver water supply, sewage treatment and energy, thereby aptly being referred to as ‘natural’ or ‘green infrastructure’ or ‘nature-based solutions’ for water managers.

Notwithstanding the high value of ecosystem services that wetlands provide to society, these ecosystems continue to be degraded, polluted, encroached upon and converted for alternate uses. A wetland area trend index constructed by Wetlands International South Asia for Indian wetlands based on 237 published data points for 1980 – 2014 indicates an average decline in natural wetlands area by 41%. The rapid loss of natural wetlands is as much a threat to water and climate security, as is an environmental crisis. As wetlands are lost, landscapes lose their capacity to store and recharge groundwater, buffer floods and droughts and treat wastewater.

With broadening of the water resources thinking from run-off to precipitation-based management incorporating land use, the role of ecosystems such as wetlands in building water system resilience

becomes highly significant in Indian context. 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. Using catchment as a planning unit and a harmonized understanding of wetlands and their hydrological functions is the foundation step for collaboration between water and wetlands sectors. Communication between the two sectors can be bridged by wetlands managers articulating water needs and hydrological functions of wetlands in terms useful to water sector, and the latter, incorporating wetlands as nature-based solutions for meeting water management objectives.

Wetlands International South Asia will be organising a virtual event to mark the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2021. Mr Suresh Prabhu, Hon'ble Member of Parliament – Rajya Sabha will grace the occasion as the Chief Guest. Prof Asit K Biswas, Distinguished Visiting Professor, University of Glasgow and a global authority on water policy and management issues will deliver the key note address and delve into the ways wetlands-water integration can be pursued in South Asia region and beyond. Dr Sonam Wangchuk (thought leader and the glacier-man of Ladakh) will share his views on bridging the wetlands-water connect in the panel discussions.

The online event is being hosted on webex:

<https://wetlandsinternational.webex.com/wetlandsinternational/j.php?MTID=m7070ccdd02f82bb920d3d97cecf48de>

(Meeting ID: 176 625 0681, password: wwd2021)

About Wetlands International South Asia

Wetlands International South Asia is a non-government organization that works for restoring and sustaining wetlands, their resources, and biodiversity in the South Asia region. The organization provides evidence-based scientific and technical advice to central and state governments, wetland authorities, and civil society on various aspects of wetland management. The Wetlands International South Asia office in New Delhi (India) was established in 1996 as part of the Wetlands International network. Wetlands International is a global, independent, non-profit organization dedicated to conservation and restoration of wetlands, and presently works in over 100 countries through a network of 18 regional and national offices and expert networks headquartered in the Netherlands. Wetlands International is also one of the five International Organization Partners of the Ramsar Convention.

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