

2ND FEB • 2024

World Wetlands Day

Theme: “Wetlands and human well-being”

Introduction

World Wetlands Day is celebrated every year on 2nd February, it aims to raise global awareness of the vital role of wetlands for people and plants. This day also marks the anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands, which was adopted as an international treaty in 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar.

Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, also known as the Convention on Wetlands, is an international treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Objectives of the Ramsar Convention

- To stop the worldwide loss of wetlands and promote their conservation.
- To promote the wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- To cooperate internationally on wetland conservation and management.

Theme

This year's theme emphasizes the critical role that wetlands play in supporting human well-being across various aspects of life. Focusing on “Wetlands and Human Wellbeing” will serve as a call to action for individuals, communities, and governments worldwide to recognize the vital importance of wetlands and take concrete steps to protect them for the present and future generations.

What is a Wetland?

A wetland is a distinct ecosystem that is flooded or saturated by water, either permanently or seasonally. These areas have unique characteristics that differentiate them from both terrestrial and aquatic environments.

Types of Wetlands

The Convention on Wetland uses a broad definition of wetlands that includes both freshwater and marine and coastal ecosystems such as all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, Peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas, and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fishponds, rice paddles, reservoirs and saltpans.

Importance of Wetlands

- ◆ **Wetlands are important for humanity but it is at a tipping point.**
- ◆ **Only 2.5 % of the water on earth is freshwater, mostly stored in glaciers and aquifers, less than 1% is usable, and 0.3% is found in wetlands such as rivers and lakes.**
- ◆ **Wetlands store more carbon than forests. Coastal wetlands like mangroves sequester and store carbon up to 55% times faster than tropical rainforests.**
- ◆ **It helps to cope with storms and flooding. Inland, a single acre of wetland can absorb up to 1.5 million gallons of floodwater.**
- ◆ **Wetlands are a source of livelihoods and food. It provides rice for 3.5 billion people and more than a billion people live from fishing, aquaculture, and tourism.**

Benefits of restoring Wetlands

- 1. Revive Biodiversity:** 40% of the world's species live or breed in wetlands. Restoring wetlands powers the local food chain and attracts wildlife.
- 2. Improve Water Quality:** Water can intercept runoff from surfaces prior to reaching open water and remove pollutants through physical, chemical, and biological processes. It also provides cost effective alternative to traditional wastewater and storm water treatment.
- 3. Acts as a source of water:** Wetlands serve as a primary source of freshwater. Over 95% of the available freshwater is found in aquifers, making them the most important source of drinking water and irrigation.
- 4. Serves as flood and storm buffers:** They reduce droughts and serve as flood buffers. It operates as sponges in the upper part of a basin, absorbing precipitation and snowmelt and allowing water to gently percolate into soil.

Threats to Wetlands

- 1. Pollution:** Runoff from agricultural land, factories, and urban areas pollutes wetlands and harms their ecosystems.
- 2. Habitat destruction:** Draining, dredging, and filling wetlands for development destroys critical habitats for plants and animals.
- 3. Climate change:** Rising sea levels, changes in precipitation patterns, and increased temperatures threaten the health and survival of wetlands.

Ways to protect wetlands

- ◆ Educating or raising awareness among citizens about the importance of wetlands and their role in maintaining the balance of our planet.
- ◆ When developing wetlands, use environmentally friendly methods that minimize the impact on the ecosystem. This can include using permeable pavements, preserving existing vegetation, and avoiding construction in sensitive areas.
- ◆ Minimizing the impact of recreational activities such as boating and fishing on wetlands. This can include enforcing regulations and providing education to recreational users on the importance of protecting wetlands.
- ◆ Creating wetlands reserves to preserve them for future generations. These reserves can be used for research, education, and recreation while providing habitat for wildlife.
- ◆ Reducing the amount of pollution entering wetlands, as pollution can have a significant impact on wetland ecosystems. This can include reducing the use of chemicals and plastics, properly disposing of waste, and limiting the discharge of pollutants into wetlands.
- ◆ Implementing effective water management practices that regulate the flow of water can help in reducing the risk of floods and droughts and improve the health of wetland ecosystems.

