

Standard Operating Procedures
on
Mission Sahbhagita



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1. Background

Wetland ecosystems form the core of the society's ecological as well as economic security. Located at the interface of land and water, wetlands, the 'kidneys of landscape', are vital for food and water security. They help stabilize water supplies, cleanse polluted waters, protect shorelines, and recharge groundwater aquifers. The extensive food chain and biological diversity in wetlands make them 'biological supermarkets'. Wetlands are valuable as sources, sink and transformers of a multitude of biological, chemical and genetic material. In addition, wetlands have special attributes as cultural heritage of humanity, and have deep connections with our beliefs and practices. They are indeed an important part of our natural wealth and 'liquid assets' for development.

India has 15.98 million ha of wetlands, roughly equalling 4.8% of its geographical area. A majority of wetlands (nearly three fourths) are less than 2.25 ha in area. The diversity of these wetlands range from high altitude wetlands of Himalayas, floodplains of Rivers Ganga and Brahmaputra, saline flats of Great Indian Desert, lagoons and mangrove marshes on the coastline and reefs in the marine environment.

Despite their immense biodiversity and ecosystem services and values, the wetlands are one of the most rapidly degrading ecosystems. The National Wetlands Decadal Change Atlas, 2021 prepared by the SAC has indicated that in the last ten years, several natural coastal wetlands have been lost. Considerable pressure also exists on inland wetlands from encroachment, pollution, invasive species, water regime fragmentation, unsustainable harvest of species and unregulated tourism. A core driver of wetland degradation has been limited integration of wetland's full range of biodiversity and ecosystem services and values in sectoral developmental planning.

Conservation and management of wetlands have been accorded a high priority by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Since 1986, MoEFCC has put in place a national wetlands programme to support state governments in formulating and implementing integrated management plans, the flagship programme being the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA) which aims at 'mainstreaming the full range of wetlands biodiversity and ecosystem services within development plans and programmes at various levels'. The 100 Wetlands Rejuvenation Programme under the 169 Transformative Ideas of the Government of India has now been upscaled into all districts of the country with a target of reaching out to 1,000 wetlands, covering all districts of the country. A four-pronged approach of preparation of brief documents, rapid ecosystem health assessment, constitution of wetland mitra, and preparation of integrated wetlands management plan has been standardised within the NPCA framework.

India has ratified the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1982 expressing her commitment to conservation and wise use of all wetlands in her territory. As on date, 49 wetlands have been designated to the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), this contributing to the overall goal of 'developing and maintaining an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and services'. With other 26 site designation proposals submitted to the Convention, the list of Ramsar Sites is expected to include 75 wetlands, thus also coinciding with the country's 75th year of Independence.

Wetlands are societal assets with the government acting as a trustee of these assets on behalf of the citizens of India. To achieve tangible change, an 'all of government' and an 'all of society' approaches are the need of the hour. Wetlands conservation has been majorly driven by biodiversity conservation agendas and protected area approaches. It is pertinent that wetlands are mainstreamed in the developmental agenda. This requires integration of conservation and sustainable development of wetlands within the district level plans and programmes prepared for different sectors such as tourism, disaster management, environment and others. This requires strengthening of the mechanisms for interagency cooperation at district level as well as the local levels through Urban Local Bodies and Panchayats.

Mission Sahbhagita is an important step towards participatory conservation and wise use of wetlands, Amrit Dharohars, to enable a society ownership approach with communities leading at the forefront. The Mission is launched on the occasion of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav- an initiative of the Government of India to celebrate and commemorate 75 years of independence and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements.

2. Objective

The goal of Mission Sahbhagita is to conserve and sustainably manage wetlands of national and international significance for building societal resilience. The objective of the Mission is 'a healthy and effectively managed network of 75 wetlands of national and international significance which support water and food security; buffer from floods, droughts, cyclones and other extreme events; employment generation; conservation of species of local, national and international significance; climate change mitigation and adaptation actions; and recognition, conservation and celebration of cultural heritage.'

3. Coverage

The mission will cover wetlands or wetland complexes having an area of 100 ha or more (when located below 2,500 m above mean sea level elevation) and 5 ha or more (when located above 2,500 m above mean sea level elevation) and meeting at least one of the following criteria:

- Is of significant cultural, religious or recreational importance;
- Is representative, rare or unique example of natural or near natural wetland of a biogeographic zone;
- Supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities (as evaluated through national list or IUCN Red List);
- Supports populations of plants and animal species important for maintaining biological diversity of a region;
- Provides important hydrological functions - such as water storage, purification, ground water recharge, and regulation of floods, droughts and other water-related disaster risks;
- Is an important source of livelihood dependence for communities living in and around;
- Has been designated as a Wetland of International Importance under Ramsar Convention

Wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters. To protect coherent sites, 'wetlands may include riparian and coastal zones adjacent to wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six meters at low tide lying within the wetlands'.

This broad-ranging definition covers a large category of inland aquatic systems (such as ponds, lakes, marshes, swamps and peatlands); coastal and nearshore marine ecosystems (such as coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds and estuaries) and human-made wetlands (such as rice-paddies, fish-ponds, and water storage areas as tanks, reservoirs, and dams).

Wetland complexes are two or more wetlands connected hydrologically (such as through flood pulses), ecologically (through shared species and communities) and culturally (forming a part of site of historical or cultural importance, or having shared reverence)

4. Mission Duration

The Mission will be for a five-year period.

5. Participating Ministries/ Departments/ Organizations

The Amrit Dharohar Programme will be run with a 'whole of government' approach in all its aspects and accordingly, a wide swath of ministries/ departments and organizations will work together to accomplish the goals. Following ministries will play a significant role:

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- Ministry of Jal Shakti
- Ministry of Rural Development
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Tourism
- NITI Aayog

6. Implementation Strategy

6.1. Approach

The Mission adopts a 'whole of society' approach for conserving and sustainably managing Amrit Dharohars, with primary stakeholders and local communities at the forefront; enabling a shift from government-driven to society ownership approach. The approach takes cognisance of the following key aspects:

- Development plans and programmes integrate and augment wetlands conservation and sustainable management at all levels
- 'Amrit Dharohar' wetlands stimulate, inspire and enable replication and upscaling of wetlands conservation and sustainable management within all districts of the country
- Societal attitudes and behaviours towards wetlands is transformed to that of custodian and stewards of natural and cultural heritage
- Management actions are 'science and evidence-based', taking into account multiple knowledge systems, and guided by a system of effectiveness assessment.

6.2. Institutional Arrangements

The Mission Sahbhagita will be implemented through a network of formal and informal institutions and individuals, working together for a common cause:

At Site level: Amrit Dharohar Prabhari coordinating site management with Wetland Mitra Network, line government departments and agencies, knowledge partners, civil society organisations and corporate sectors.

At District level: District Wetland Committees (under the DC) ensuring that convergence is built with district-level conservation and development plans and programmes.

At State/UT level: Wetland Authorities reviewing and approving site management plans and providing access to funds for implementing management from central and state-level public sector schemes, as well as corporate sector partnerships.

At National Level: Wetlands Division of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change maintaining oversight and providing requisite convergence platforms, capacity development and monitoring support - collaboratively with Ministry of Jal Shakti, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development, NITI Aayog; National Wetlands Committee; knowledge partners and corporate sector platforms.

At International Level: Multi-lateral environmental agreements, UN agencies, donors and international organizations championing the cause of conservation of wetlands, sharing lessons and experiences, and enabling replication and upscaling.

6.2.1. Amrit Dharohar Prabhari

The Amrit Dharohar Prabhari will be responsible for the following activities:

- Establish an inscription at Amrit Dharohar site - displaying information on site's uniqueness, conservation significance, cultural significance and management arrangements
- Nurture a network of 'Wetland Mitra' for stakeholder engagement in wetland management actions
- Coordinate development of action plan for conservation and sustainable management
- Identify 'cultural icon(s)' and run community campaigns relating the icon to wetlands conservation and sustainable management
- Organize Amrit Dharohar Utsavs linked to local legends/cultural values of the wetland.
- Design and implement citizen science programme - such as Asian Water bird Census' to engage citizens in wetlands monitoring and management
- Coordinate targeted stakeholder education, awareness and behaviour change campaign to incentive affirmative actions for wetlands conservation and sustainable management through existing or refurbished wetland interpretation centres
- Commission baseline wetland inventories through the support of knowledge partners, corporate and civil society partners
- Connect with Panchayats and BMCs in the vicinity; connect with local schools and teachers for awareness-raising among children and youth;
- Coordinate implementation of the wetland action plan through funds from ongoing development plans and programmes, including through engagement with corporates

- Coordinate periodic wetlands monitoring and management effectiveness review to assess whether mid-course correction in wetland management implementation is required

6.2.2. District Wetland Committees

The primary responsibilities of the District Wetland Committee include:

- Review wetland management plans, in consultation with all relevant departments and sectors
- Integrate wetland management actions in district level environment plans, disaster risk reduction plans, district development plans and others
- Build convergence of wetland management plan with district level development plans
- Periodic review of management plan implementation and monitoring outcomes

6.2.3. State Wetland Authorities

The State Wetland Authorities will have the following key roles in Mission Sahbhagita:

- Map each Amrit Dharohar Site with District Wetland Committees, Knowledge Partners, Corporate Sector and CSO Partners
- Designate Amrit Dharohar Prabhari for each wetland with a mandate to deliver roles and responsibilities as prescribed
- Review and approve management plans
- Ensure access to funds for implementing management plan actions by building convergence with conservation and development sector schemes
- Provide platform for business engagement in wetlands management
- Review wetlands monitoring information, and undertake mid-term course correction as may be required
- Notify Amrit Dharohar sites under Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 and other extant regulation

6.2.4. Wetlands Division of MoEFCC

The Wetlands Division of the MoEFCC will conduct the following activities:

- Conduct orientation programmes for Amrit Dharohar Prahari for integrated management of Wetlands with Jan-Bhagidaari
- Liaise with CPCB to include Amrit Dharohar wetlands in National Water Quality Monitoring Programme (NWMP)
- Liaise with Jal Shakti Mantralaya to incorporate Amrit Dharohar Wetlands within the network of CWC hydro-meteorological observation sites
- Commission systematic biodiversity inventories with ZSI, BSI and other knowledge partners
- Establish 'Amrit Dharohar' coordination committee/group with participation of other relevant central ministries and Niti Aayog.

- Track wetland related commitments under various environmental treaties and ensure their fulfilment
- Ensure incorporation of full range of wetland ecosystem services and biodiversity values in sectoral policies and programmes at national level
- Establish a 'technology accelerator' lab in participation with the corporate sector and knowledge partners
- Establish with 'ENVIS Programme' – a Green Skill Development Programme related with conservation and sustainable management of wetlands

6.3. Priority Actions

Following priority actions have been identified for the implementation within the six months of the initiation of the Mission:

- Amrit Dharohar signage at 75 wetlands of national and international significance
- At least one public engagement event at each of the 75 wetlands
- For each Amrit Dharohar site - a mapping of the nodal government department, district administration, research organizations and civil society partners is completed [in consultation with concerned State / UT Wetlands Authorities]
- Complete mapping of wetlands and zone of influence [engaging SWA, SAC, and knowledge partners]
- Enrolment system for wetlands mitra and linking with national wetland portal
- Management plans for sites wherein no such plans exist, the mission with support updation
- Commissioning biodiversity inventories with ZSI, BSI and knowledge partners
- Agreements with CPCB on incorporation of wetlands within National Water Quality Assessment network
- Agreements with CWC on incorporation of wetlands within the National Grid of Hydrological Stations
- Publish a package of best practices for wetlands management
- A national level publication on 'Amrit Dharohar' documenting their values (cultural, economic and ecological) and local legends
- Showcase Amrit Dharohar mission at CBD COP15 and Ramsar COP

The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the implementation of the Mission Sahbhagita is placed in Annex 1.

7. People's participation

People's participation is an integral component of the Mission Sahbhagita. Through its 'whole of society' approach, the Mission aims at enabling inclusive and community driven efforts for conservation and sustainable management of the Amrit Dharohars of the country. People's participation will be ensured at all the levels of the execution of the mission through the following engagement mechanisms:

- Engaging the network of Wetland Mitra in stakeholder consultation for wetland management planning and implementation
- Engaging local communities in organising Amrit Dharohar Utsavs linked to local legends/cultural values of the wetlands
- Engaging citizens in wetlands monitoring through citizen science programmes
- Engaging Panchayats, local schools and teachers for awareness-raising among children and youth

8. Monitoring framework

The progress of the Mission Sahbhagita will be regularly reviewed and monitored at various levels:

At Ministry/National level

1. National Amrit Dharohar Committee convened by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
2. Joint Secretary (Wetlands), MoEFCC would act as mission director
3. Central schemes nodal officers (CSNO): the in-charge Joint Secretary of the scheme/Programme for convergence will be the CSNO and will monitor their respective programmes

At State level

1. Each State/UT Wetland Authority will appoint a state nodal officer who shall be responsible for the implementation, monitoring and overall outcome of the mission in the state

At District level

1. District Collector/ District Magistrate/ Deputy Commissioner will be the District Nodal Officer (DNO) and will be overall in charge of the mission at the district level. A committee of all stakeholders will be formed under the DNO for implementation and monitoring

At site level

1. A dedicated Prabhari for each Amrit Dharohar site will be deputed by State Wetland Authority

Wetlands of India Portal: <https://indianwetlands.in> will have a dashboard to indicate progress of Amrit Dharohar Programme. Progress review will also be conducted at Amrit Dharohar coordination committee and National Wetlands Committee meeting. The Mission will utilise various supervision tools used under NPCA programme

9. Resources for the Mission

The resources for the implementation of the activities under the mission will be available from NPCA, IDWH, CAMPA, Mahatma Gandhi NREGS, XV Finance Commission Grants (both tied and untied), PMKSY-WDC, PMKSY-HKPP-RRR or similar schemes from the State/ Central Government either individually or in combination may be accessed for this purpose. Corporate Sector funding may be accessed

10. Documentation

- State Wetland Authorities shall document the implementation of the mission at State level, recording various stages of citizen engagement, management planning, corporate sector engagement and others.
- Short films will be produced by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
- Separate national level detailed report on Amrit Dharohar Mission will be documented by the Wetlands Division of MoEFCC
- Amrit Dharohar Prabhari will be responsible for uploading at least three videos of the Amrit Dharohar site i.e. before commencement, during development and post-management, and upload any other media documenting the conservation and wise use of Amrit Dharohar sites
- Ministries, States or Districts may also post progress, stories, and learnings on Social Media concurrently

11. Contact for Mission Sahbhagita

Joint Secretary
Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (National Focal Point- Scientific and Technical Review Panel)
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan
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Annex 1: Roles and Responsibilities

	Amrit Dharohar Site	District	State	National	International
Amrit Dharohar Prabhari	<p>Coordinate management action plan design and implementation</p> <p>Coordinate Amrit Dharohar festivals</p> <p>Coordinate monitoring of Amrit Dharohar Sites</p> <p>Constitute Wetlands Mitra network</p>	<p>Represent issues related to Amrit Dharohar sites in district plans and programmes</p>	<p>Communicate information on status and trends in Amrit Dharohar sites through the dashboard</p>		
Citizens and Stakeholders (Wetland and Mitra)	<p>Participate in management planning, implementation and monitoring</p> <p>Support awareness generation on wetland values and functions</p> <p>Keep an eye on developmental actions around wetlands</p>	<p>Support wetland Prabhari in raising Amrit Dharohar site-related issues</p>			

District Administration	Periodic overview of site condition and management plan implementation	Integrate Amrit Dharahar site management actions in district level plan and programmes Allocate funds for implementing wetland management actions	Represent Amrit Dharahar site management issues in State-level plans and programmes		
State Wetland Authorities	Review and approve management plans Periodic monitoring Update State dashboard	Ensure constitution and effective functioning of district wetland committees	Review and approve Amrit Dharohar management plans Ensure convergence of Amrit Dharohar site management actions with conservation and developmental plans and programmes Notify Amrit Dharohar sites under extant regulations	Provide an overview of Amrit Dharohar sites to the MoEFCC and National Wetland Committee	
Knowledge Partners	Support management plan design	Support district wetland committees in Amrit Dharahar related decision making	Support State Wetland Authorities in Amrit Dharohar related decision making	Management oriented knowledge support for effective management of Amrit Dharohar sites	

Civil Society Organizations	Support management plan design	Support district wetland committees in Amrit Dharohar related decision making	Support State Wetland Authorities in Amrit Dharohar related decision making	Support behavioural change communication programmes	
Corporate Sector	Support management plan implementation	Need based support Align business operations to support wetlands conservation and sustainable management	Need based support Align business operations to support wetlands conservation and sustainable management	Support establishment technology accelerator funds	
Research Organizations / Academia	Support management plan design and implementation	Support district wetland committees in Amrit Dharohar related decision making	Support State Wetland Authorities in Amrit Dharohar related decision making	Provide research inputs for effective management of Amrit Dharohar sites Build technology interface	

MoEFCC and other national ministries	Capacity development for wetland prabharis Training of trainers for knowledge partners, Research Organisations and Academia		Oversight Need based capacity development support	Maintain an oversight of status and trends of Amrit Dharohar sites Facilitate convergence with National ministries Integrate Amrit Dharohar sites within National Monitoring programmes	
International Conventions / UN Agencies				Track and report progress on wetland related indicators Communicate case studies and lessons at international platforms	Showcase Amrit Dharohar learnings at international platforms