Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 & 2017

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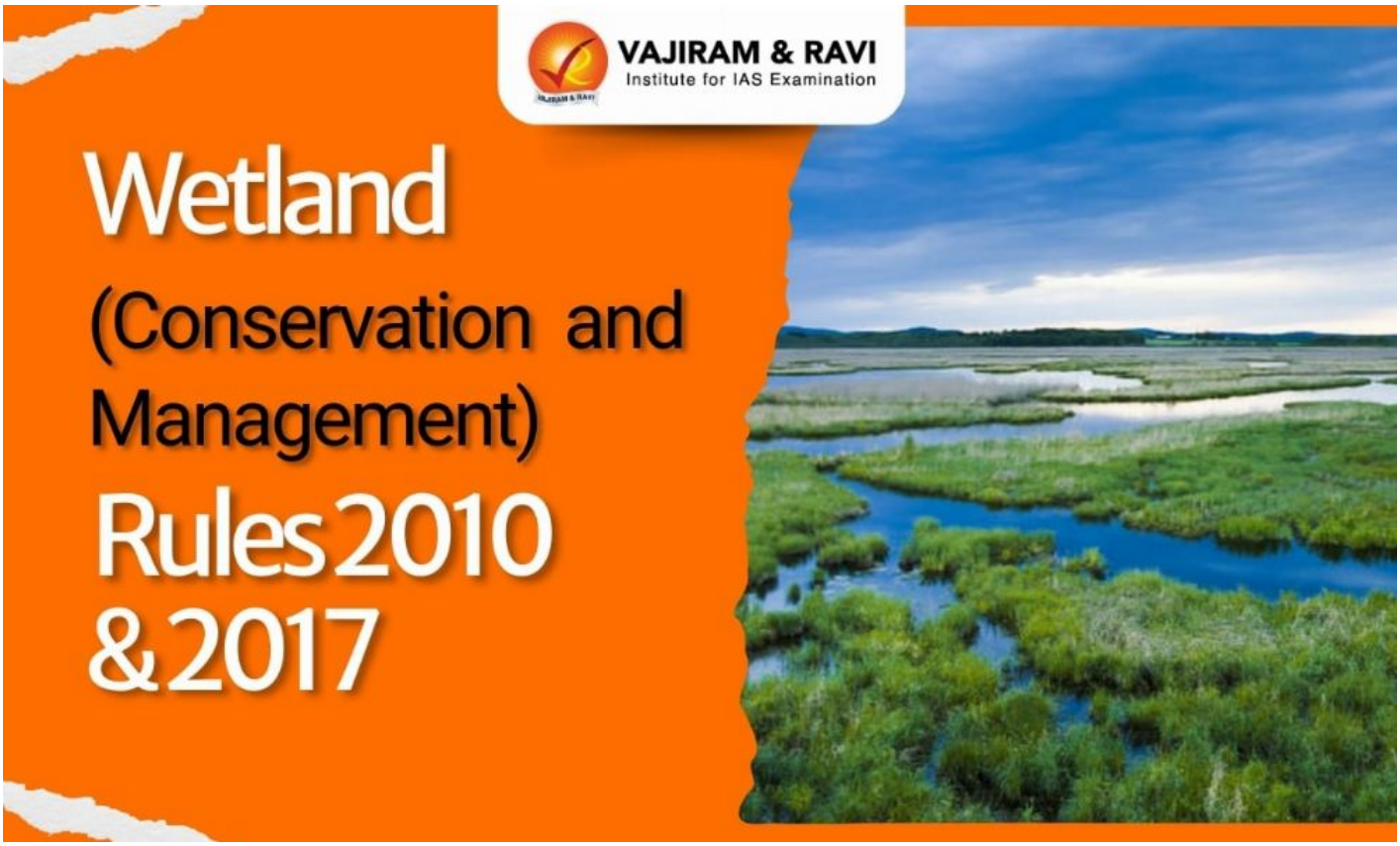

The **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 and 2017** are aimed at protecting and managing India's wetlands in a sustainable way. They define what wetlands are, list activities that are **prohibited or regulated**, and set up authorities to monitor and manage these areas. The 2017 Rules strengthened the 2010 framework by **including state-level authorities, expert committees, and a digital wetland inventory**.

Together, these rules help conserve biodiversity, maintain water resources, and involve local communities in wetland protection.

What is a Wetland?

A **wetland** is an area where water is the primary factor influencing the environment and the plants and animals living there. It occurs where the **water table is at or near the land surface** or where the land is **submerged under water**, either permanently or seasonally. Wetlands are now recognised as **distinct ecosystems** with unique ecological functions, including water purification, flood control, biodiversity support, and groundwater recharge.

Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 Provisions

The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 were the first comprehensive framework in India for protecting wetlands under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**. They aimed to regulate human activities and conserve wetland ecosystems.

- Defined wetlands to include **marshes, fens, peatlands, lakes, reservoirs, tanks, backwaters, lagoons, estuaries, and man-made wetlands** up to a depth of 6 meters, including their catchment areas.
- **Prohibited activities**: reclamation of wetlands, industrialization, dumping of hazardous substances, solid waste, and activities harmful to wetland ecology.
- **Regulated activities**: withdrawal of water, harvesting of resources, dredging, etc., requiring prior approval from authorities.
- **Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA)** established to monitor activities, identify new wetlands, and evaluate state submissions.
- State governments required to submit a **brief document** on wetlands for potential protection under the rules.
- Upon approval, wetlands could be **notified as "Protected Wetlands."**
- **Appeals mechanism** available through the **National Green Tribunal** for decisions made by the authority

Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 Limitations

The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 had several limitations that affected their effectiveness:

- **Livelihood and Water Security Not Addressed:** They did not consider wetlands critical for the livelihoods and domestic water supply of dependent populations.
- **Exclusion of Smaller Wetlands:** Many small wetlands, jheels, tanks, and rural/urban water bodies performing important ecological and socio-economic functions were not included.
- **Lack of Local Authorities:** The rules did not mandate the creation of **state or district-level Wetlands Regulatory Authorities**, limiting local participation and governance.
- **No Community Representation:** The **Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA)** lacked members from local communities, farmers, or fishing associations, reducing stakeholder involvement.
- **Limited Enforcement Mechanism:** Monitoring and enforcement were largely centralized, making it difficult to address local threats effectively.

Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017 Provisions

The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017 aim to strengthen wetland protection in India by decentralizing authority, involving experts, and regulating activities to ensure sustainable use.

- Wetlands defined as lands between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems with water at or near the surface.
- Establishment of **State Wetlands Authority** in each state/UT headed by Environment Minister.
- Experts in ecology, hydrology, fisheries, and socioeconomics to be included in state committees.
- Preparation of a **comprehensive list of permitted, regulated, and prohibited activities** for wetlands.
- Replacement of CWRA with a **Central Advisory Committee** to guide policies and Ramsar site nominations.

- Creation of a **digital wetland inventory**, updated every ten years.
- Prohibition of activities like industrial expansion, conversion for non-wetland use, hazardous waste disposal, and untreated effluent discharge.
- State governments are empowered to implement local protection, while the central government retains monitoring authority.

National Wetland Committee (NWC)

The **National Wetland Committee (NWC)** is a high-level advisory body constituted by the Government of India to oversee the conservation, management, and sustainable use of wetlands across the country.

It plays a pivotal role in implementing India's wetland policies in line with the **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2010 & 2017** and the commitments under the **Ramsar Convention**.

Functions and Features of NWC:

- **Policy Advisory:** Advises the **Central Government** on formulating and implementing policies, programs, and strategies for wetland conservation.
- **Ramsar Site Designation:** Recommends wetlands of **international importance** for notification under the Ramsar Convention and ensures compliance with global standards.
- **Scientific Guidance:** Provides inputs based on **wetland ecology, hydrology, fisheries, biodiversity, and socio-economic studies** for informed decision-making.
- **Coordination with States and UTs:** Works closely with **State Wetlands Authorities** to ensure consistent and effective implementation of wetland rules at local levels.
- **Capacity Building & Awareness:** Suggests measures to **educate stakeholders, local communities, and policymakers** about the ecological and socio-economic importance of wetlands.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Tracks the status and health of wetlands, assesses the effectiveness of conservation measures, and recommends improvements.
- **International Collaboration:** Facilitates **partnerships with international agencies and organisations** for technical support, research, and sustainable management practices.
- **Reporting:** Provides periodic reports to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and **Climate Change** (MoEFCC) on wetland conservation progress.

Case Studies of Wetland Management in India

India has witnessed several successful wetland conservation projects that combine government initiatives, scientific management, and community participation.

1. Sambhar Lake, Rajasthan

- **Type:** Saltwater lake and India's largest inland salt lake.
- **Issues:** Encroachment, illegal salt mining, and pollution affecting biodiversity.
- **Management Measures:**
    - Declared a **Ramsar site** in 1990.

    - Implementation of strict regulations under **Wetlands Rules 2010**.
    - Monitoring of illegal activities and restoration of degraded habitats.
- **Outcome:** Stabilization of migratory bird populations, especially flamingos, and improved water quality.

2. Chilika Lake, Odisha

- **Type:** Brackish water lagoon, India’s largest coastal wetland.
- **Issues:** Siltation, overfishing, and pollution affecting fish and bird species.
- **Management Measures:**
    - Community-based co-management with local fisherfolk.
    - Restoration of water channels and control of invasive species.
    - Declared a **Ramsar site** in 1981.
- **Outcome:** Increase in fish catch, improved biodiversity, and enhanced ecotourism.

3. Vembanad-Kol Wetlands, Kerala

- **Type:** Largest Ramsar site in Kerala, including lakes, lagoons, and canals.
- **Issues:** Industrial pollution, urban encroachment, and habitat degradation.
- **Management Measures:**
    - Implementation of **state-level wetland authority programs** under 2017 Rules.
    - Promotion of sustainable tourism and eco-friendly aquaculture.
- **Outcome:** Improved water quality, restored bird habitats, and regulated human activities.

4. Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan

- **Type:** Freshwater marsh and UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Issues:** Water shortage, invasive species, and fluctuating wetland health.
- **Management Measures:**
    - Restoration of natural hydrology through canal and dam management.
    - Active involvement of local communities in bird conservation programs.
    - Strict enforcement of **Wetlands Rules 2010**.
- **Outcome:** Revival of migratory bird populations and enhanced ecotourism.

5. East Kolkata Wetlands, West Bengal

- **Type:** Urban wetland complex used for natural sewage treatment and fish farming.
- **Issues:** Urbanization, encroachment, and pollution threats.
- **Management Measures:**
    - Recognized as a **Ramsar site** in 2002.
    - Integrated urban planning with wetland protection.
    - Promotion of traditional aquaculture and wastewater recycling.
- **Outcome:** Sustainable fish production, wastewater treatment, and biodiversity conservation.

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