

National Waterways in India, List, Types, Significance

August 2, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



National Waterways in India are officially declared rivers, canals, and backwaters developed for inland water transport and navigation. India currently has **111 National Waterways**, including major ones like the Ganga (NW-1), Brahmaputra (NW-2), and West Coast Canal (NW-3). These waterways provide a **cost-effective and eco-friendly mode of transport**, especially for bulk goods and cargo movement. They also help reduce pressure on roads and railways, improve regional connectivity, and support trade, tourism, and economic development in the country.

Important National Waterways in India List

India has several strategically important National Waterways that strengthen inland water transport, reduce logistics costs, and improve regional connectivity. The Important National Waterways in India List is given below.

Important National Waterways in India List			
National Waterway	River / Canal	Location / States Covered	Significance

National Waterway 1 (NW-1)	Ganga River	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal	Longest National Waterway; connects northern India with eastern ports and supports bulk cargo and river tourism.
National Waterway 2 (NW-2)	Brahmaputra River	Assam	Lifeline of Northeast India; crucial for transport of tea, coal, petroleum products, and improving regional connectivity.
National Waterway 3 (NW-3)	West Coast Canal	Kerala	Supports passenger transport and cargo movement; promotes backwater tourism and coastal trade.
National Waterway 4 (NW-4)	Krishna-Godavari River System	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry	Enhances agricultural and industrial transport; improves inland-coastal connectivity in South India.
National Waterway 5 (NW-5)	Brahmani River & Mahanadi Delta	Odisha, West Bengal	Important for coal, fertilizers, and industrial goods from mining and port-linked regions.
National Waterway 6 (NW-6)	Barak River	Assam	Improves connectivity in southern Assam and links remote regions with trade centers.
National Waterway 7 (NW-7)	Godavari River	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana	Supports inland cargo transport and regional economic development.
National Waterway 8 (NW-8)	Alappuzha-Changanassery Canal	Kerala	Important for passenger transport and local trade in Kerala's backwater region.
National Waterway 10 (NW-10)	Amba River	Maharashtra	Facilitates movement of goods between ports and industrial zones near Mumbai.
National Waterway 16 (NW-16)	Barak-Kushiyara Stretch	Assam	Strengthens inland transport and cross-border connectivity with Bangladesh.

National Waterway 27 (NW-27)	Cumberjua Canal	Goa	Supports iron ore transport and boosts tourism-related water transport.
National Waterway 37 (NW-37)	Gandak River	Bihar, Uttar Pradesh	Supports agricultural trade and rural connectivity in the Ganga basin.
National Waterway 58 (NW-58)	River Mandovi	Goa	Promotes inland water tourism and transport of mining and local goods.
National Waterway 73 (NW-73)	River Narmada	Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat	Facilitates movement of agricultural and industrial goods; supports port connectivity.
National Waterway 97 (NW-97)	Sunderbans Waterways	West Bengal	Vital for eco-tourism, disaster relief, and connectivity in delta and island regions.

National Waterways Act 2016

The National Waterways Act, 2016 was enacted by the Government of India to promote inland water transport and develop waterways as an alternative mode of transportation.

- It declared **106 new waterways** as National Waterways.
- With this Act, the total number of National Waterways increased from **5 to 111**.
- The Act aims to promote **inland water transport (IWT)** as a cost-effective and eco-friendly transport system.
- It provides a legal framework for the **development, regulation, and maintenance** of waterways.
- The Act allows the government to develop **navigation infrastructure**, including terminals and cargo facilities.
- It supports **private sector participation** in water transport projects.
- The implementation and development of waterways under this Act are mainly handled by the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)**.
- The Act helps in improving **logistics efficiency and trade connectivity** across India.

Inland Waterways Authority of India

The **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** was established in 1986 by the Government of India to regulate and develop inland waterways for shipping and navigation. It plays a key role in strengthening inland water

transport by developing infrastructure on National Waterways across the country.

- IWAI was created in **1986** under the Inland Waterways Authority of India Act.
- It is responsible for the **regulation, development, and maintenance** of inland waterways used for navigation.
- The authority mainly focuses on developing **Inland Water Transport (IWT) infrastructure** on National Waterways.
- It undertakes projects such as **dredging, construction of terminals, navigation aids, and river traffic management systems**.
- These development and maintenance projects are carried out using **grants provided by the Ministry of Shipping**.
- The **headquarters of IWAI is located in Noida**, Uttar Pradesh.
- IWAI also has **regional offices in various cities and towns** across India to oversee local waterway development and operations.

Jalvahak Scheme

The **Jalvahak Scheme** is a government initiative aimed at promoting cargo transportation through inland waterways in India.

- The scheme is launched to **increase cargo movement through National Waterways**.
- It encourages a **modal shift from road and rail transport to inland water transport (IWT)**.
- The scheme provides **financial incentives and operational support** to cargo operators and businesses.
- It aims to reduce **logistics costs** for industries by promoting water-based transport.
- The scheme helps in reducing **fuel consumption and carbon emissions**, making transport environmentally sustainable.
- It supports the development of **waterway infrastructure**, including terminals and cargo handling facilities.
- The scheme is implemented with support from the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)**.
- It promotes **efficient freight movement**, especially for bulk goods like coal, cement, fertilizers, and agricultural products.
- The scheme also helps in generating **employment opportunities** in transport and logistics sectors.

National Waterways in India Significance

National Waterways in India play a vital role in strengthening the country's transport system by providing a cost-effective, energy-efficient, and environment-friendly mode of transportation.

- **Cost-Effective Transport:** Inland water transport is cheaper than road and rail transport, especially for bulk and heavy goods.
- **Energy Efficient:** Waterways consume less fuel per tonne-kilometre, making them an energy-saving mode of transport.
- **Eco-Friendly Mode:** Inland water transport produces lower carbon emissions and causes less environmental pollution.

- **Reduced Traffic Congestion:** Development of waterways eases pressure on highways and railway networks.
- **Boost to Trade and Industry:** National Waterways support domestic trade by enabling smooth movement of raw materials and finished goods.
- **Improved Regional Connectivity:** They connect remote and river-based regions with major markets and ports.
- **Support to North-Eastern States:** Waterways like the Brahmaputra improve accessibility in areas where road and rail infrastructure is limited.
- **Employment Generation:** Development of waterways creates jobs in transport, logistics, tourism, and infrastructure sectors.
- **Tourism Promotion:** River cruises, ferries, and water tourism help promote local tourism and cultural exchange.
- **Disaster-Resilient Transport:** During floods or natural disasters, waterways can serve as alternative transport and relief routes.

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/national-waterways-in-india/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.