Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the new sites in the list of international wetlands; about wetlands and their importance; Ramsar sites in India; Efforts made by the govt. to conserve them

News: Ten more Indian wetland sites, including the first from Maharashtra, have received the tag of international importance under the Ramsar Convention — an inter-governmental global treaty to preserve ecological character of selected wetlands across the globe.

Where are these wetlands?

The 10 new ones are

1. Maharashtra (1): Nandur Madhameshwar bird sanctuary
2. Punjab (3): Keshopur- Miani community reserve, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal wildlife sanctuary; and

- Maharashtra got its first Ramsar site: The site (Nandur Madhameshwar) is used by diverse group of species especially by resident birds for breeding and by migratory birds as a winter stopover site.

- With this, the list of wetlands in India under the Convention has grown to 37 with surface area of over 10,679 sq km, an area nearly the size of Sikkim and Goa put together.

Procedure for designating wetlands of international importance

- Under the Ramsar (Iran) Convention of 1971, the member countries identify those sites which are recognised as being of significant value not only for the country or the countries in which they are located, but for humanity as a whole.
Globally, there are over 2,300 Ramsar sites around the world, covering over 2.1 million sq km.

**Wetlands and their importance**

The wetlands — land areas covered by water, either temporarily or permanently — play a key role in flood control, water supply and providing food, fibre and raw materials. Besides, such land areas also support migratory birds from colder regions of the world in summers, apart from mangroves that protect coastlines and filter pollutants.

**Efforts made by India in wetland conservation**

- Sharing information on new Ramsar sites ahead of the **World Wetlands Day (February 2)**, the environment ministry claimed that it has prepared a **four-pronged strategy** for the restoration of wetlands which includes preparing a baseline data, wetland health cards, enlisting wetland ‘mitras’ (friends) and preparation of targeted Integrated Management Plans.

- The ministry had on January 6 notified new guidelines for implementing **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017** which prohibit setting up or expansion of industries, and disposal of construction and demolition waste within the wetlands.

- The inclusion of a wetland in the list embodies the government’s commitment to take steps necessary to ensure that its ecological character is maintained.