**Syllabus subtopic:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about Wular lake and its conservation; Ramsar convention and its significance; WTI

**News:** The Jammu and Kashmir administration has embarked on a project to cut over 20 lakh trees to “reclaim” the shrinking Wular Lake spread across north Kashmir’s Bandipore and Baramulla districts.

**About the move**

The Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA) has started cutting trees on the Ramsar wetland — an area of international importance and once Asia’s largest freshwater lake. The project was started on the basis of a 2007 report by Wetlands International South-Asia, a non-profit organisation that works to sustain and restore wetlands.

**Background**

In its 2007 report, Wetlands International had suggested removing all trees from inside the lake boundary. Most trees to be cut, fall in Ningli forest range. “Ningli plantation, currently occupying 27.30 sq km, needs to be removed for enhancement of water holding capacity. The removal would help enhancement of water level by at least one meter, which is critical to restoration of biodiversity,” the report states.

**Concerns raised**

- With the cutting of 2 lakh trees already underway in the first phase, experts advise caution. They call for a study on the ecological impact of cutting trees in such large numbers.
- Another study by Wildlife Trust of India, while recommending the cutting of trees, has called for proper studies to assess the impact. The WTI report says that on an average, 33 kg of carbon dioxide is trapped by each tree.
annually, making it over 72,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide by 21.84 lakh trees.

About Wular lake

- Wular Lake is one of the largest fresh water lakes in Asia. It is sited in Bandipora district in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The lake basin was formed as a result of tectonic activity and is fed by the Jhelum River. The lake's size varies seasonally from 12 to 100 square miles (30 to 260 square kilometers). In addition, much of the lake has been drained as a result of willow plantations being built on the shore in the 1950s.
- The Tulbul Project is a "navigation lock-cum-control structure" at the mouth of Wular Lake.
- The largest freshwater lake in Jammu and Kashmir, Wular has considerably shrunk over the past eight decades. Officials records show that 27 sq m of the lake has silted up and turned into a land mass. In the 1980s, the central government proposed to dam the water by constructing Wular barrage. The project, however, was shelved after rise in militancy in the state.

About Ramsar convention:

- The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the Caspian Sea, where the treaty was signed on 2 February 1971. Known officially as ‘the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat’ (or, more recently, just ‘the Convention on Wetlands’), it came into force in 1975.

- The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. This includes 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 fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans.

Montreux Record:

- Montreux Record under the Convention is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur.
as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.

- It is maintained as part of the Ramsar List. The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990). Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie.

About Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)

It is a leading Indian nature conservation organisation committed to the service of nature. Its mission is to conserve wildlife and its habitat and to work for the welfare of individual wild animals, in partnership with communities and governments. WTI’s team of 150 dedicated professionals work towards achieving its vision of a secure natural heritage of India, in six priority landscapes, knit holistically together by nine key strategies or Big Ideas.

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) currently runs 44 projects across India.