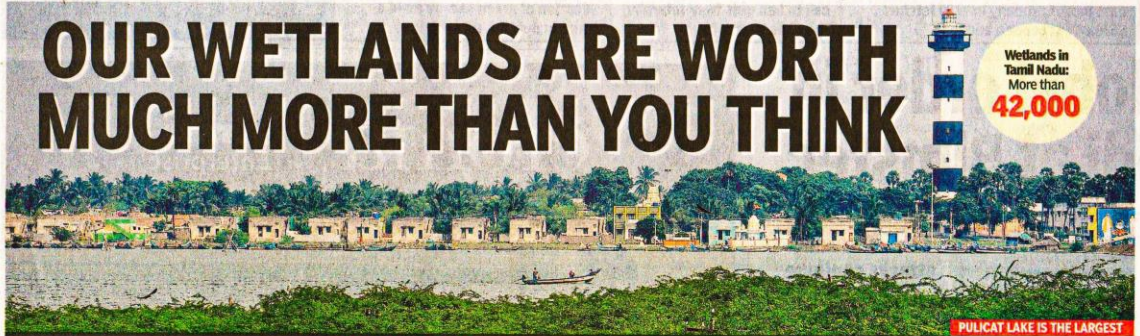


A Govt Study Puts A Value To Benefits Of Waterbodies, Paves Way For Their Restoration



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KMari, a 45-year-old fisherman, earns ₹1,000 every day selling the fish he catches from Pulicat lake. There are more 10,000 fishermen like him in 32 villages around the lake who depend on it for their livelihood. Given their economic and ecological significance, the Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority formed to oversee more than 42,000 wetlands in the state, decided to put a value to 141 prioritised wetlands. Researchers from the Madras Institute of Development Studies studied 80 wetlands in phase I over three years and concluded that they are worth ₹4,386.6 crore per annum. The report, submitted recently also said that if these 80 wetlands are restored to full capacity, the services they provide would be worth ₹17,467.9 crore per annum.

So what are these benefits that have been quantified? MIDS researchers said a lake's worth can be calculated based on the direct and indirect services it offers. For instance, Pulicat lake alone provides economic services worth ₹1,133 crore a year. This includes the value of direct services such as fish, fuel, genetic materials and fresh water that people use. Indirect services are its role in regulating erosion, pollution and the water table. Cultural services are its role in recreational activity and aesthetics, and in nutrient cycling.

To understand the impact, more than 5,000 households that depend on the 'services' of these lakes were interviewed. Veeranam lake, which supplies drinking water to Chennai, provides services worth ₹192 crore a year to the residents around it. The highly polluted Korattur lake's benefits have been valued at ₹12 crore a year. Those of Valachery lake, which has not been desilted for years, are worth ₹2.2 crore. The Pallikaranai marsh, which is highly encroached and has turned into a dumpyard, provides benefits valued at ₹53.8 crore. The benefits from Cholavaram, which supplies water to the city, have been put at ₹1,113 crore a year.

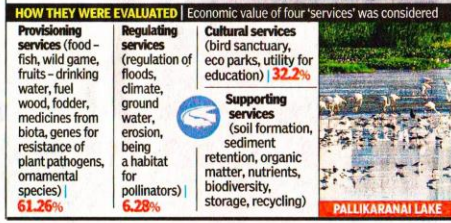
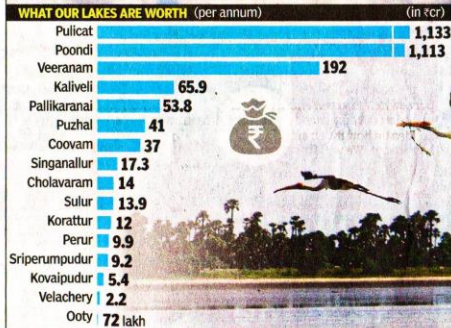
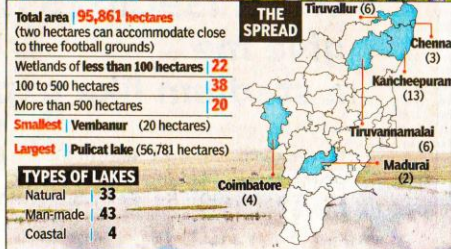
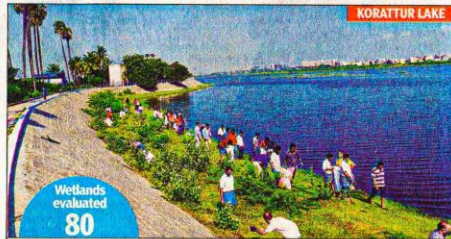
MIDS professor L Venkatachalam, who led the project, said, "These services are economically highly valuable, but are not traded in the real market. But they are used in consumption and production activities. Since there is no proper mechanism that captures the true economic value of a wetland, policies tend to ignore their importance making them vulnerable to depletion, degradation. When we put a price tag to these services, the government can work on policies exclusively for each lake and also include the local community as they benefit the most from these services."

The MIDS report says it will take only 203 crore to restore these 80 wetlands. The action to be taken includes curbing construction, removing encroachment, stopping dumping of waste and effluents, besides checking overfishing and over-exploitation of water.

"Also, desilting needs to be done scientifically as it can degrade fishing and affect the biota. These wetlands are important not just for climate change mitigation and as water reserves, but also for the basic survival of locals," said Venkatachalam.

Deepak Srivastava, chairperson of the state wetland authority, said the public works department has been asked to notify 29 of the wetlands. "About 13 will be notified as Ramsar sites for which documents have been submitted. Once the notification comes through, a technical committee will suggest measures to restore them," he said.

COUNTING BENEFITS



TNSWA gets a move on

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Since its formation in 2016, The Tamil Nadu State Wetlands Authority (TNSWA) has finally made moves and asked the water resources department to notify 29 wetlands in the state as priority wetlands.

Once a wetland is notified, the authority will get power to stop activities detrimental to its existence.

The TNSWA has already formed a technical committee with scientists, environmentalists and experts on wetlands. Talks are being held on working scientifically to improve the quality of wetlands.

The TNSWA was formed in 2016 based on a Supreme Court direction after a PIL was filed in 2001. All states were directed to set up the state wetland authority. Later, the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 were framed.

The TNSWA will become one of the owners of the wetlands and help manage them by implementing Section 4 of the rules that aims to do away with illegal activities, encroachments, exploitations, solid waste and effluent dumping in wetlands and so on.

The state government allocated ₹150 crore exclusively for

the ecological restoration of 100 wetlands in 2021-2022.

Scientists from the technical committee told TOI that the authority is important because wetlands declared as sanctuaries come under the Wildlife Protection Act. If they are under the fisheries department, it will look at lakes as sources of producing fish. Local bodies beautify them. PWD maintains them, the HR&CE department may use them as temple tanks, the forest department looks at the tourism and biodiversity aspects and the development authority will reclassify them for construction of buildings. Only the TNSWA, if run independently, can bring all the departments under one roof and look at the conservation of the wetlands from an objective point of view.

V S Vijayan of Salim Ali Foundation told TOI that unless the authority functions independently, it would be of no use.

TNSWA member secretary Deepak Srivastava said the government has forwarded 13 Ramsar site proposals to the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change under the Tamil Nadu Wetlands Mission. "If these wetlands are designated as Ramsar sites, it will be the first such notification after 20 years," he said.

THE STUDY CALCULATED

► Actual economic value of services obtained by people dependent on wetlands and market prices

► Willingness of people to pay for these services

► Maximum potential value of these services if the wetland was restored to its full capacity which was termed as benefit transfer value. For instance, Chennai pays ₹200 cr every summer for water from Veeranam. If that benefit is transferred to locals around Veeranam, they would be willing to maintain the lake



WHAT KILLS OUR WETLANDS
Encroachment, pollution, open defecation, garbage, water theft, over exploitation by fishing, hunting, medical waste dumping, industrial effluents, invasive species, stray animals, mosquito breeding

Source: Madras Institute of Development Studies