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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# A Lake Under Siege: The NGT, Chandlai and India's Wetland Governance Gap

 **DOWN TO EARTH**

8 July 2026

**ENVIRONMENT****GS3****GS2**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# A Lake Under Siege: The NGT, Chandlai and India's Wetland Governance Gap

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## THE LIFT LINE

A 150-year-old lake near Jaipur that draws hundreds of migratory birds is being strangled by **encroachment** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/encroachment/>) and the untreated effluent of roughly 1,255 unauthorised textile units. When the National Green Tribunal has to order a district collector to simply stop garbage and sewage from entering a waterbody, the failure is not of law but of enforcement. Chandlai is a small lake with a large lesson about how India governs its wetlands.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Wetland conservation, environmental adjudication and the gap between environmental law and implementation are staple Mains themes. The Chandlai case is a current, concrete illustration of the NGT's enforcement role and of India's wetland-governance architecture.

**GS Paper 3:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; **environmental impact assessment** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/>); ecosystems and biodiversity.

**GS Paper 2:** **Statutory** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/statutory/>), regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies; government policies and their implementation; important international conventions.

**Prelims angle:** National Green Tribunal (NGT Act, 2010); the **Ramsar Convention** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/ram-sar-convention/>) on Wetlands (1971); the Montreux Record; Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017; the Water Act, 1974 and Air Act, 1981; State Pollution Control Boards; Central Zone Authority for wetlands; migratory-bird habitats.

**Mains angle:** Why India's wetlands keep degrading despite laws and Ramsar listings, and how governance and enforcement can be strengthened.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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Chandlai Lake, a more than 140-year-old waterbody near Jaipur with a dam built around 1872, is a rich habitat for migratory birds and holds historical and cultural significance. It has been degraded for years by encroachment and by effluent from the textile cluster in the Sanganer area, where a joint committee found around 1,255 units operating in non-conforming zones, many without the permissions required under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. The State Pollution Control Board had earlier issued show-cause notices to more than a thousand of these units.

In July 2026, the National Green Tribunal directed the District Collector and the Municipal Commissioner of Jaipur to act immediately to remove encroachments and to stop untreated water and garbage from entering the lake, and it sought an action-taken report from the district authorities and the SPCB within a fixed period. The NGT, a specialised body set up under the NGT Act, 2010 for the effective and [expeditious](https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/expeditious/) disposal of environmental cases, has repeatedly had to step in where administrative machinery has failed.

India's wetland framework is not thin on paper. The Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 [provide for identifying and notifying wetlands](https://ujjiyari.com/terms/wetlands-conservation-management-rules/), prohibiting harmful activities and constituting authorities to manage them. India is also a party to the Ramsar Convention and has a large and growing number of Ramsar sites. The problem, as Chandlai shows, is the distance between this framework and its enforcement on the ground.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The central argument is that India protects wetlands generously in law and in international commitments but poorly in practice, so degradation continues because identification, notification, pollution control and encroachment removal are weakly enforced, forcing the NGT to do the administration's job.

### Law Without Enforcement

The Wetlands Rules, 2017 and the pollution statutes give authorities ample power to prevent exactly what happened at Chandlai. Effluent discharge and encroachment persisted because those powers were not exercised, revealing an enforcement deficit rather than a legislative one.

### Wetlands Fall Between Jurisdictions

Wetland governance is split across pollution boards, municipal bodies, revenue authorities and wetland authorities. This fragmentation lets responsibility diffuse, so no single agency owns the outcome, and encroachment and pollution proceed unchecked.

## The NGT as a Backstop, Not a Substitute

The NGT's intervention is essential, but a tribunal ordering a collector to prevent garbage from entering a lake is a symptom of administrative failure. Judicial backstops cannot substitute for routine, proactive enforcement across thousands of wetlands.

INSTRUMENT	PURPOSE	THE GAP AT CHANDLAI
Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017	Identify, notify, protect wetlands	Weak notification and protection on the ground
Water Act, 1974 / Air Act, 1981	Control effluent and emissions	Units operating without permits
Ramsar Convention	International wise-use commitment	Habitat degraded despite conservation value
NGT Act, 2010	Expeditious environmental adjudication	Forced to direct basic administrative action

### HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Separate the stock of law from the flow of enforcement. India has built a strong stock: rules, statutes, a tribunal and international commitments. What fails is the flow, the day-to-day exercise of those powers, and Chandlai is a flow failure. Apply the commons lens: a wetland delivers diffuse public benefits, groundwater recharge, flood buffering, bird habitat, while pollution offers concentrated private gains to nearby units, so without active enforcement the private interest wins. Add the accountability lens: because responsibility is split across agencies, no one is answerable, which is precisely why a court has to name a single official and demand an action-taken report. The way forward, therefore, is not more law but clearer ownership, monitoring and consequences.

### THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Chandlai, a 150-year-old migratory-bird lake -> encroached and polluted by about 1,255 unauthorised textile units in Sanganer -> Wetlands Rules 2017 and pollution laws exist but go unenforced -> responsibility splits across SPCB, municipality and revenue authorities -> degradation continues -> NGT steps in, orders the Collector to remove encroachments and stop effluent, demands an action-taken report -> the real fix is ownership, monitoring and enforcement, not new law -> the wetland's ecosystem services are preserved.

### WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Enforce the Wetlands Rules, 2017.** Complete identification, notification and demarcation of wetlands, and actually prohibit and penalise the listed harmful activities.

- 2 **Fix accountability.** Assign a single lead authority for each wetland with clear responsibility for pollution control, encroachment removal and monitoring, so responsibility does not diffuse.
- 3 **Regularise or relocate polluting clusters.** Bring the Sanganer textile units into compliance with common effluent treatment and zoning, or relocate non-conforming units.
- 4 **Use technology for monitoring.** Deploy remote sensing and periodic audits to track encroachment and effluent, making violations visible early.
- 5 **Leverage** (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/leverage/>) **community and Ramsar frameworks.** Involve local communities and use Ramsar wise-use principles and management plans to protect wetlands proactively rather than only after NGT orders.

## PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC regularly examines wetlands and environmental governance (2018: “How does biodiversity vary in India? How is the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002** (<https://ujijari.com/terms/biological-diversity-act/>) helpful in conservation of flora and fauna?”; 2019 on the NGT; and recurring questions on Ramsar sites in Prelims). This editorial anchors those with the live Chandlai case and the enforcement-gap argument.

**Practice question:** “India protects its wetlands well in law but poorly in practice.” Examine this statement with reference to the Wetlands Rules, 2017 and the role of the National Green Tribunal in wetland governance. (15 marks, 250 words)

Sources: *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>)

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