The importance of Himalayan wetlands

ICIMOD

FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE

The Himalayan wetlands are a complex of snow, ice, glaciers, glacial lakes, riparian areas, permafrost, peatlands, wet meadows, and freshwater springs. The wetlands located at or above 3000 masl are called High Altitude Wetlands (HAWs). The wetlands are intricately linked to the culture, traditions, and livelihoods of the mountain people, but they are highly vulnerable to change, especially global warming, land use change, and changes in habitats and water regime, as well as to unmanaged human **The Himalayas are the water tower of Asia.** The Himalayas have a total glaciated area of around 33,000 sq.km. There is about 12,000 cu.km of freshwaters. They are also the sources of ten largest rivers of Asia.



actions.

Wetland biodiversity includes floating and submersed plants, microbes, animals, fish, birds, and insects. Migratory birds like the black-necked crane, endangered species like the Himalayan newt, and economically valuable species are an integral part of the wetland ecosystem. **Himalayan wetlands** provide freshwater, food, fiber, fuelwood, and fodder; regulate and purify water; and store carbon in peats. They help stabilise local environments and the adjoining landscapes.



Socioeconomically the wetlands are sacred sites associated with people's religious beliefs, myths, and folklore and often seen as places of spiritual transformation and

artistic inspiration. Wetlands influence people's livelihoods through tourism, livestock raising, fishing, and others.



Conserving the Himalayan wetlands

ICIMOD supports the wise use and conservation of wetlands through the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. The Initiative promotes the conservation and sustainable use of mountain wetlands in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region through an ecosystem approach. It supports the wise use of wetlands by bridging the science-policy divide and promoting local culture and traditional knowledge for sustaining ecosystem functions and services.

2010 International Year of Biodiversity

Photos: Alex Treadway and ICIMOD staff

ICIMOD GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Khumaltar, Lalitpur, Nepal Tel +977-1-5003222 Email info@icimod.org Web www.icimod.org