Sukhna and Sauj: Wetland Recognition and Wise Use

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Environment: wetlands, habitats and conservation

News Reference:

On 15 October 2026, the Ramsar Secretariat announced the addition of Sukhna Wetland and Sauj Lake to the list of Wetlands of International Importance. That announcement stated the number of India's Ramsar sites as 103. The number is in the context of this date, not a fixed total for the future.

Location and Type:

Sukhna is a near-city reservoir on the edge of Chandigarh city, at the foot of the outer Himalayas. Its water level changes seasonally. Different habitats are found from open water to shore vegetation and forest.

Sauj is a shallow lake in Uttar Pradesh, in the floodplain of the Ganga, surrounded by fields. Do not treat it as a near-city reservoir like Sukhna or a lake at Himalayan altitude. Saman Bird Sanctuary near Sauj is a separate Ramsar site.

Two Sites, Different Ecologies

Sukhna: a near-city reservoir on the edge of Chandigarh

Sauj Lake: a shallow lake of the Ganga floodplain in Uttar Pradesh

Wise use: sustainable use while maintaining the ecological character

The list is recognition, not a management option

Habitat for Birds:

Sukhna provides food, breeding, rest and winter habitat for resident waterbirds and birds arriving on the Central Asian flyway. Knowing only the tourism use of the lake is not its full ecological identity.

Sauj is part of a large wetland network. The Secretariat has mentioned its regular use by more than 30,000 waterbirds and its IBA recognition by BirdLife International. IBA recognition and the Ramsar list are recognitions of two different systems.

Differences in Management:

In Sukhna, silt coming from the catchment and invasive species are management issues. In Sauj, a seasonal fishing ban, prohibition of fine nets and control of cattle access are proposed measures. Do not write proposed measures as rules already in force.

The Meaning of Wise Use:

Ramsar's concept of wise use is of maintaining the ecological character through the ecosystem approach in the context of sustainable development. It is not a complete prohibition of all human uses, but it is not arbitrary exploitation either.

In the exam, keep a site's listing recognition and its actual management separate. A site becoming a Ramsar site does not by itself end silt or invasive species. Conservation and sustainable use are read together.

To understand another analysis related to Sukhna, read: Sukhna and Sauj Lake: India's Ramsar Sites Reach 103.

Prelims: Practice Questions

Question 1. Consider the following pairs:

1. Sukhna - a reservoir on the edge of Chandigarh

2. Sauj - a shallow floodplain lake of Uttar Pradesh

3. Sauj and Saman Bird Sanctuary - the same Ramsar site

Which pairs are correct?

(a) Only 1 and 3

(b) Only 2 and 3

(c) Only 1 and 2

(d) 1, 2 and 3

See answer and reason

Answer: (c). Saman near Sauj is a separate site; the first two location-type relations are correct.

Question 2. Which of these matches Ramsar's wise use concept?

(a) Maximum exploitation while ignoring the ecological character

(b) A complete ban on every human use in all reservoirs

(c) Treating only tourism income as conservation

(d) Maintaining the ecological character and sustainable use through the ecosystem approach

See answer and reason

Answer: (d). Wise use connects conservation and sustainable use.

Question 3. The Secretariat described some fishing-control measures for Sauj as proposed. What is the appropriate conclusion?

(a) All of them are proved to be already legally in force

(b) The status of the proposal and of rules in force must be verified separately

(c) Being included in the list ends all fishing rules

(d) The management of both lakes is the same in every respect

See answer and reason

Answer: (b). A proposed measure cannot be taken as proof of an order in force.

Sources:

Ramsar Secretariat: announcement of two Indian sites, 15 October 2026

Ramsar: Wise use of wetlands