

'Wetlands vanishing at an alarming pace'

They remain dangerously undervalued, says the report

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
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Wetlands, among the world's most valuable and biodiverse ecosystems, are disappearing at an alarming speed amid urbanisation and agriculture shifts, conservationists said on Thursday, calling for urgent action to halt the erosion.

"We are in a crisis," Martha Rojas Urrego, head of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, told reporters in Geneva, warning of the potential devastating impact of wetland loss, including on climate change.

The convention, adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar nearly a half-century ago, on Thursday issued its first-ever global report on the state of the world's wetlands.

The report found that around 35% of wetlands – which include lakes, rivers, marshes and peatlands, and



A file photo of the Loktak Lake in Manipur.

• RITU RAJ KONWAR

coastal and marine areas like lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs – were lost between 1970 and 2015.

Today, wetlands cover more than 12 million square km, the report said, warning that the annual rates of loss had accelerated since 2000.

"We are losing wetlands three times faster than forests," Mr. Rojas Urrego said, describing the Global Wetland Outlook report as a "red flag". While the world

has been increasingly focused on global warming and its impact on oceans and forests, the Ramsar Convention said wetlands remain "dangerously undervalued".

Thursday's report, released ahead of a meeting of the parties to the convention in Dubai next month, stressed the importance of wetlands to all life on Earth.

Directly or indirectly, they provide almost all of the world's consumption of freshwater and more than 40% of all species live and breed in wetlands. Animals and plants who call wetlands home are particularly vulnerable, with a quarter at risk of extinction, the report said.

Wetlands also provide a livelihood for more than one billion people, while mitigating floods and protecting coastlines.