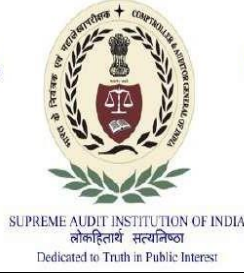


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PRESS RELEASE

On

The Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India

on

Conservation and Management of Lakes in Jammu and Kashmir

for the period ended March 2022

Government of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir

Report No. 04 of 2025

(Performance Audit - Civil)

This Report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Section 72 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. The Report was forwarded to the Government of Jammu and Kashmir on 17 November 2025. The Report has been laid on the table of the Jammu and Kashmir legislature on 30.03.2026.

This Report covers matters arising out of the Performance Audit on Conservation and Management of Lakes in Jammu and Kashmir. The Performance Audit covered the period from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The efforts taken for Conservation and Management of Lakes prior to 2017 were also reviewed for holistic coverage of the topic.

Out of total 697 natural Lakes in Jammu and Kashmir, the audit sample comprised 63 Lakes (test-checked Lakes) and include six Lakes viz. Dal, Wular, Hokersar, Mansar, Surinsar and Manasbal. which were selected for detailed examination.

Key findings:

At the National Level, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) is the nodal agency committed to conservation and wise use of wetlands (including Lakes) within its territory. The administrative control of Lakes in J&K is vested with five Departments viz. Forest, Revenue, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development and Tourism. The Forest Department in J&K was mandated (October 1989) to handle Conservation and Management of all 697 Lakes. Out of 697 Lakes, six Lakes viz. Wular, Dal, Anchar, Gilsar, Khushal Sar and Manasbal Lakes were transferred (1997-2012) to three Development Authorities.

Audit observed that these Departments/ Authorities had fragmented mandate and responsibilities for fully complying with the entrusted mandate e.g. GoJ&K assigned (October 1989) EE&RSD to conduct a detailed survey of Lakes, study their physical, chemical and biological dynamics and on the basis of the data so collected, prepare

detailed plans for development and monitoring of each Lake. However, the detailed survey was not carried out by the Department being deficient in technical manpower.

There was no Centralised Development and Regulatory Authority and no specific legal statute/ Act for Conservation and Management of Lakes had been put in place. Due to the absence of a Lake specific Centralised Development and Regulatory Authority and specific legal statute/Act, there were diffused functions across various institutions, inadequacies in institutional arrangements for discharge of environmental functions related to Lakes, lack of cross-sectoral institutional convergence, monitoring and evaluation.

There were significant changes in land use and classification use of areas of Lakes. Analysis of remote sensing data for the period 2014-2020 related to 63 test-checked Lakes revealed that there was decrease of area of open water, and increase of area in other land uses like built-up, pasture, vacant land, fallow land, agriculture, horticulture, plantation etc.

The Department stated that the data provided by Ecology Environment & Remote Sensing Department (EE&RSD) regarding land use/ classification use changes need to be validated by ground truthing. It was further stated that detailed remote sensing for all Lakes of J&K was not possible due to budget constraints, however it could be carried out for some major Lakes. The reply should be seen in the light of the fact that the Directory of Lakes and water bodies of J&K was prepared using high resolution data supported by limited field checks/ground truthing.

The geo-coordinates of the 63 audit sampled Lakes provided by the EE&RSD were plotted by audit on Google Earth Pro on various timelines. It was found that seven Lakes¹ were not visible or had almost dried up. There were land use changes in Khushal Sar Lake and degradation/ shrinkage of Anchar Lake. Although Development Authorities were established for development of areas of five out of six detailed-checked Lakes, there were no clear directions and specific mandate with any of these authorities for Conservation and Management of Lakes.

GoJ&K had Conservation and Management programmes for only six Lakes viz. Dal, Wular, Hokersar, Manasbal, Surinsar and Mansar, which were examined in detail by audit. In respect of the remaining 691 Lakes, Forest Department neither identified the eligible Lakes nor formulated any plans to seek assistance under various programmes launched by the MoEF&CC. Approximately one *per cent* (₹ 560.65 crore) of CAPEX budget of Jammu and Kashmir during 2017-22 was allocated to six detailed-checked Lakes. In case of the 63 sampled Lakes, changes in the catchment area of Lakes had not been evaluated from time to time. Further, there was lack of assessment of water carrying capacity and water budget of Lakes. Flushing on scientific grounds, restoration of water quality of Lakes to their original trophic levels, evaluation and preservation of biodiversity, assessment of expected life of Lakes, identification and treatment of source points and non-source points of pollution, de-weeding and dredging as per laid down

¹ (i) Rakh-i-Arth, (ii) Sether Gund Numbal, (iii) Marhama, (iv) Devpursar, (v) Mahtan, (vi) Chandargar Numbal and (vii) Galwal Talao.

norms as well as public awareness among masses had either not been carried out or were inadequately implemented in respect of the 63 sampled Lakes.

Detailed audit examination of the six Lakes also disclosed several shortcomings regarding the implementation of their Conservation and Management programmes. There were land use changes in Dal Lake due to non-acquisition of land from Dal dwellers, malfunctioning of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), improper de-weeding mechanism and inadequate monitoring and surveillance mechanism. Consequently, the open water area in Dal Lake could not be restored. There were inadequacies in the implementation of Lake conservation programme under National Lake Conservation Programme (NLCP), Prime Minister's Reconstruction Plan (PMRP) and other programme activities. Audit also noticed deficiencies in installation and upgradation of STPs, treatment of solid waste, extracted weed and sludge as well as providing sewage disposal facilities to households and sewer networking of "mohallas". Inadequacies were also noticed in relocation and alignment of houseboats, shifting of hotels, augmentation of water budget of the Lake, restoration and development works, catchment management works and relocation/ rehabilitation of Dal Lake dwellers.

Due to non-constitution of monitoring bodies, the Conservation and Management programme of Wular Lake had suffered as policy matters of Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA) could not be decided. Non-formulation of detailed plan resulted in deprivation of financial assistance from GoI for rejuvenation and restoration of Wular Lake. Insufficient afforestation in degraded forests resulted in increase of siltation in the Lake and consequent hastening ageing of the Lake.

The planned activities for survey and demarcation, catchment conservation, enhancement of water holding capacity and water quality improvement were inadequately carried out. Training programmes, awareness generation and research activities for ensuring capacity building, public awareness and monitoring of impact of Lake conservation activities were not carried out.

Similarly, in case of Hokersar Lake no comprehensive plan was formulated for Conservation and Management of the Lake. Wildlife Protection Department had formulated only annual plans which did not address the root causes of degradation of Lake such as change in hydrological regimes, pollution or loss of biodiversity in the Lake. Due to lack of survey and demarcation, Lake area measuring 2,528.10 kanals of Hokersar Lake had been encroached upon.

Wildlife Warden-Kathua (WLW-Kathua) and Surinsar-Mansar Development Authority (SMDA) did not have a specific legal framework and clear demarcation of responsibility for Conservation and Management of the Surinsar and Mansar Lakes. In the absence of any comprehensive plan for Conservation and Management of Lakes, WLW-Kathua and SMDA were carrying out Lake-related activities in a ad-hoc manner. State level monitoring committee had not monitored Conservation and Management of the twin Lakes. WLW-Kathua and SMDA had not carried out demarcation of boundary of Surinsar and Mansar Lakes due to which the two Lakes had remained open to encroachments. No STPs were in place for treatment of sewage generated by inhabitants living in the vicinity of Lakes resulting in discharge of untreated waste and sewage into

the Lakes. Introduction of exotic species into the Lake had resulted in dwindling of number of native fishes.

Similarly, no comprehensive plan was in place for Conservation and Management of Manasbal Lake. Wular Manasbal Development Authority (WMDA) did not have a specific legal framework and clear-cut responsibility for Conservation and Management of the Lake. Lake management plans were formulated, financed and implemented through annual plans, in which only marginal Lake related activities such as sanitation of the area, de-weeding and dredging of Lake were included. Non-demarcation of Manasbal Lake beyond seven kilometers of length exposed the Lake to encroachments. The sources of sewage entering the Lake, which were responsible for pollution in the Lake were not identified. Due to non-finalisation of Master Plan of the area, unrestricted development and construction work was going on around the Lake and there were cases of encroachment and unauthorised constructions.

Some of the Recommendations proposed are:

- *The Government may explore the possibility of establishing a central and specialised Authority and equipped with the necessary resources to ensure focused, coordinated and accountable conservation and management of Lakes.*
- *Manpower with technical and domain expertise including environmental and hydrological engineers, wetland ecologists, limnologists, remote sensing and Geographic Information System specialists, ornithologists and microbiologists should be provided.*
- *Concerted efforts should be made to formulate a comprehensive conservation and management plan for Lakes after taking into consideration all the relevant natural and anthropogenic factors affecting the health of Lakes.*
- *Robust Lake management policy should be in place to ensure effective functioning and upgradation of Sewage Treatment Plants and proper treatment of sewage and solid waste.*
- *Encroachments in the Lake and impact of inflow of nutrients into the Lake need to be monitored regularly and mitigation measures may be taken expeditiously*
- *Point sources/ non-point sources of pollution entering the lakes need to be identified and treated.*