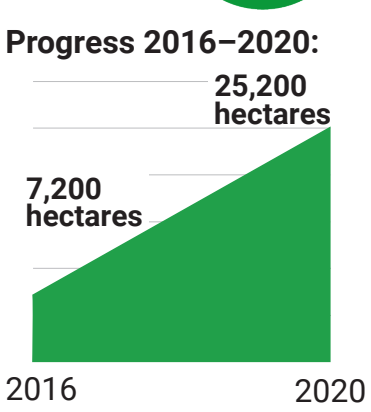
UN WATER
INTEGRATED MONITORING INITIATIVE FOR SDG 6

UN environment
United Nations Environment Programme

WHAT PROGRESS LOOKS LIKE

CHINA – ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION AND RESTORATION (SDG TARGET 6.6)

Progress indicator: SDG 6.6.1 Spatial extent of wetlands
Level of impact: Sub-national, Hubei Province (2% of China's total land area)
Result: 25,200 hectares of wetland has been protected and restored through the restoration of degraded wetland areas (7,200 hectares), the reconversion of agricultural land (12,800 hectares), and the creation of new wetland areas (5,000 hectares); this represents a 250% increase in wetland areas.



SITUATION

The Hubei wetland area is located in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, in Hubei Province in China. Hubei Province, which covers 2 per cent of China's total land area, is rich in freshwater resources and is known as the province of a thousand lakes. The Yangtze, Han Jiang and Qing Jiang rivers converge here, forming China's largest area of freshwater ecosystems, comprised of lakes, rivers and vegetated wetlands.

The Hubei wetland area is a biodiversity hotspot, accounting for 73 national rare and endangered species. Four wetlands in Hubei Province are registered on the list of Wetlands of International Importance compiled by the Convention on Wetlands. The wetlands provide a habitat and wintering ground for many species of wetland migratory waterfowl, and serve as an important ecological barrier protecting neighbouring areas from flooding. In addition to the important role it plays in groundwater recharge, flood storage and fish production, the site is important for environmental education and tourism, with about 20,000 visitors annually.

The wetlands in Hubei face many threats. Climate change and human activity have led to a drastic reduction in the size, ecological integrity and ecosystem services of the area. Physically, wetland degradation is the result of encroachment, water quality deterioration and the invasion of pests. From an administrative point of view, difficulties in coordination between departments and inadequate management capacity have worsened the situation. These circumstances have resulted in a pressing need to strengthen the management of the protected land and wetland ecosystems, to stop habitat degradation and biodiversity loss.

PROGRESS MADE

China's 13th national five-year plan (2016–2020) was instrumental as the inaugural national policy tool to drive wetland action in Hubei. The plan included national targets to address the severe environmental degradation seen in the country. This countrywide policy prioritized environmental degradation as a core development action and facilitated the subsequent allocation of national financial resources towards Hubei central and provincial government offices dedicated to wetland monitoring, assessment, protection and restoration actions within Hubei.

These central and provincial government offices set up a hierarchical management and protection system for wetlands, delineating the area into 4 wetlands of international importance, 8 wetlands of national importance and 66 national wetland parks. The government ranked these groups, giving ranking 1 (highest priority) to their wetlands of national importance, ranking 2 to wetlands of international importance and ranking 3 to wetland parks. This hierarchical ranking system facilitated the allocation of available resources towards protection and management activities.

As a result of this work, 7,200 hectares of degraded wetland has been restored, 12,800 hectares previously lost to agricultural land has been restored, and 5,000 hectares of new wetlands have been created. In total, the Hubei wetland area now comprises 25,200 hectares, which represents a percentage growth of 250 per cent.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Recognition of social, economic, and environmental benefits associated with sustainable wetlands ecosystems management practices
- Environmental degradation identified as a priority within national development planning, facilitating dedicated budget allocations to freshwater ecosystem protection and restoration activities
- Categorization of ecosystem types and prioritization to achieve biggest wins

LEARN MORE

- Global Times press release and video
- Freshwater Ecosystems Explorer from UNEP
- Overall progress on SDG 6 in China

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Water data from sources listed under 'Learn more' (2016–2020)