

Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment

Why in News?

Recently, the administration of the Union Territory of Ladakh ordered a joint spatial mapping and field verification process across the Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary.

Objectives

- **Joint Field Verification** - Teams combining revenue, forest, defence, and police personnel are deploying satellite imagery, GPS mapping, and ground verification to audit land use across the sanctuary.
- **Scope of Mapping**
 - **Defense Installations** - Mapping established military camps, forward defence infrastructure, and strategic access roads deployed along the border ecosystem.
 - **Traditional Rights** - Documenting customary grazing rights (*tsam-dro*) and seasonal routes utilised by nomadic **Changpa** pastoralists.
 - **Settlement Rights Determination** - Resuming statutory processes to fix cut-off dates for existing civilian and administrative structures without legitimizing post-cut-off encroachments.
- **Timelines** - Field officials must submit **fortnightly progress reports**, ensuring a structured channel for public hearings before final boundary orders are issued.

Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Established in** - 1987.
- **Location** - Eastern Ladakh, spanning roughly 4,000km² across a high-altitude plateau.
- **Major High-Altitude Lakes** -
 - Tso Moriri (Ramsar Site),
 - Pangong Tso (transboundary endorheic lake), and
 - Tso Kar (Ramsar Site).
- **Flora** - Characterized by arid alpine meadow vegetation, cold-desert scrub, and specialized halophytic marsh plants around brackish lakes.
- **Keystone Wildlife Species** - **Snow Leopard**, **Kiang** (Tibetan Wild Ass), **Himalayan Wolf**, **Wild Yak**, **Tibetan Argali**, and **Bharal** (Blue Sheep).
- It serves as a breeding ground for migratory birds like the **Black-necked Crane** (*Grus nigricollis*) and **Bar-headed Goose**.
- **Indigenous Community** - Changpa pastoralists rearing pure-bred Changthangi (Pashmina) goats, dependent on customary grazing grounds (*tsam-dro*).
- It also houses historical Buddhist heritage sites such as the 19th-century **Korzok Monastery**.
- **Protected Status** - Designated as a Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary in 1987 under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.

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Reference

[The Print | Spatial mapping of Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary](#)