NGT Verdict on the ‘Art of Living’ Case

What is the issue?

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- Sri Sri Ravishankar’s Art of Living Foundation (AoL) organised a 3 day World Culture Festival (WCF) in March 2016.
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- The event is said to have caused severe environmental & ecological damaged to the Yamuna floodplains.
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- National Green Tribunal (NGT) has now given its final verdict on the matter and has upheld the guilt of AoL.
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How did the issue evolve?

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- AoL was initially granted permission for organising the event WCF event on the banks of river Yamuna.
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- The permission was on the condition that AoL would be held responsible for restoration of the allocated space after the event.
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- The event had caused “serious pollution on the floodplain of the river” as nearly 35 lakh people had gathered.
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- A case was initiated in the NGT with stress on the ‘Polluters Pay Principle’.
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What were the expert committee findings?

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- Initially, the NGT had levied Rs 5 crores as damage compensation.

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- Subsequently, NGT-appointed expert committee noted that the damages would cost over Rs 42.02 crores.
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- It was also estimated that restoration could take up to 10 years.
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- The expert committee had found that about 420 acres of floodplains of the Yamuna had suffered adverse ecological impact.
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- Further, “changes in topography, habitat, and loss of wetlands, vegetation and biodiversity” have been observed.
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- Also, degradation in the nature of soil, toxic substances and substrata degradation have been established.
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What were major legal pronouncements?

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- AoL argument that lack of notified wetlands around Yamuna, was rejected as not being notified doesn’t mean absence of wetlands.
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- Notably, in large parts of the country the wetlands as of now have neither been identified nor notified in accordance with law.
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- The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has also been pulled-up as it had failed to oversee compliance with the environmental laws.
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- But despite this comprehensive estimate of damages, NGT has resisted from enhancing the fine amount from the earlier 5 crores.
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- While, the tribunal has ruled for proceeding with the restoration work, AoL has stressed that it intends to go on appeal to the SC.
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Source: The Indian Express

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