

Remote Sensing Applications in Wetland Conservation and Management

Dr. Ananya Mehta

Associate Professor

Department of Environmental Science

Green Valley Institute of Technology, Pune, India

Email: *ananya.mehta@gvit.edu.in*

Mr. Rohit Sharma

Research Scholar

Department of Geoinformatics

National Institute of Remote Sensing, Dehradun, India

Email: *rohit.sharma@nirs.ac.in*

Abstract

Wetlands are among the most productive and ecologically significant ecosystems, providing vital services such as water purification, biodiversity support, and climate regulation. However, rapid urbanization, agricultural expansion, and climate change have significantly degraded these habitats. Remote sensing technology, combined with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), has emerged as a powerful approach for mapping, monitoring, and managing wetlands. This paper explores various applications of remote sensing in wetland conservation and management, including habitat mapping, hydrological monitoring, vegetation health assessment, and pollution detection. Different remote sensing sensors and data analysis techniques are discussed with case studies from global and Indian contexts. The integration of multispectral, hyperspectral, and radar data has proven highly effective in identifying wetland boundaries, monitoring seasonal changes, and assessing anthropogenic impacts. The study concludes that the

strategic use of satellite and UAV-based remote sensing can enable informed policy-making and sustainable wetland management strategies.

Keywords: Remote sensing, Wetland conservation, GIS, Hyperspectral imaging, UAV mapping, Habitat monitoring.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wetlands, defined as transitional zones between terrestrial and aquatic systems, play a crucial role in ecological balance. They provide habitat for numerous species, act as carbon sinks, and offer protection against floods. However, these ecosystems are increasingly threatened by anthropogenic activities and climate-induced changes. Traditional ground-based wetland surveys are often time-consuming, costly, and logistically challenging.

Remote sensing offers a cost-effective, repeatable, and spatially comprehensive means of assessing wetlands. From global-scale mapping to local-scale hydrological monitoring, remote sensing has revolutionized wetland research. This paper focuses on how remote sensing supports conservation and management efforts through timely and accurate data.

2. REMOTE SENSING TECHNOLOGIES FOR WETLAND STUDY

2.1 Satellite-Based Remote Sensing

Satellite imagery from sensors such as Landsat, Sentinel-2, and MODIS has been extensively used for wetland mapping and change detection. Multispectral data provides valuable insights into vegetation health, water turbidity, and land cover changes.

2.2 UAV and Drone Applications

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) offer high spatial resolution imagery for detailed mapping of small and fragmented wetlands. They can capture data even under cloudy conditions using LiDAR and thermal sensors.

2.3 Radar and LiDAR Systems

Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) from satellites like Sentinel-1 is particularly effective in wetland mapping, as it penetrates cloud cover and detects soil moisture variations. LiDAR provides accurate elevation data essential for hydrological modeling.

3. APPLICATIONS OF REMOTE SENSING IN WETLAND CONSERVATION

3.1 Wetland Inventory and Mapping

Remote sensing facilitates the creation of comprehensive wetland inventories, essential for conservation planning.

3.2 Monitoring Seasonal and Long-Term Changes

By comparing multi-temporal datasets, researchers can monitor changes in wetland area, vegetation cover, and water levels.

3.3 Habitat and Biodiversity Assessment

High-resolution imagery helps assess species-rich zones and track habitat fragmentation.

3.4 Pollution Detection

Satellite-based thermal and hyperspectral sensors can detect pollution sources such as oil spills and algal blooms.

Table 1: Key Remote Sensing Techniques in Wetland Monitoring

Technique	Sensor Example	Application
Multispectral Imaging	Landsat, Sentinel-2	Vegetation health, water quality, land cover changes
Hyperspectral Imaging	Hyperion, PRISMA	Species mapping, pollution detection
SAR Imaging	Sentinel-1, RADARSAT	Soil moisture, flood mapping
UAV Photogrammetry	DJI Phantom 4 RTK	High-resolution habitat mapping

Explanation: This table summarizes major remote sensing technologies and their specific applications in wetland conservation.

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1 Chilika Lake, India

The Chilika Lake wetland complex has been monitored using Landsat and Sentinel-2 imagery to assess seasonal water spread, detect illegal aquaculture, and guide eco-tourism planning.

4.2 Florida Everglades, USA

Long-term MODIS and SAR data have been used to track hydrological patterns and invasive plant spread in the Everglades, aiding habitat restoration projects.

5. INTEGRATING REMOTE SENSING WITH GIS

Combining remote sensing data with GIS enables the integration of environmental, hydrological, and socio-economic datasets. This approach enhances wetland vulnerability assessments and supports spatial decision-making.

6. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Challenges include cloud cover in optical imagery, data processing complexity, and high costs of hyperspectral sensors. Future advancements will focus on artificial intelligence-based image classification, improved UAV autonomy, and near-real-time monitoring systems.

7. CONCLUSION

Remote sensing has become indispensable in wetland conservation and management. It enables continuous monitoring, supports biodiversity assessments, and aids in formulating evidence-based conservation policies. By integrating satellite, UAV, and GIS technologies, stakeholders can effectively protect and restore these critical ecosystems.

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