

Move to notify EGREE region as Ramsar site hangs fire

• STAFF REPORTER



Migratory grey herons taking a flight over the mangrove forest in the Coringa wildlife sanctuary in East Godavari district.- File Photo: K.R. Deepak

A proposal to notify the East Godavari Riverine Estuarine Ecosystem (EGREE), a wetland mosaic landscape consisting of 44 high-impacting fishing villages encompassing the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, as a Ramsar site has been pending with the Forest Department for quite some time.

Coringa is the second largest mangrove in India after the Sundarbans in West Bengal with exceptional coastal and marine biodiversity. Though conservation activities are in progress in Coringa, the wildlife region outside the mangroves is being severely affected by industrial development.

Although the industrial units, including those related to fishing, aquaculture, salt pans, port and shipping, oil and natural gas, and manufacturing units, are observing certain environmental safeguards, they are found to be inadequate to effectively address the special conservation needs of the EGREE region.

Against this background, the UNDP-sponsored EGREE Foundation has sent a proposal to the government to declare the region as Ramsar site six months ago, but the file is still pending with the government.

“Of the 169 sites included in the Ramsar worldwide, Kolleru is the only site from Andhra Pradesh. Interestingly, the EGREE region is satisfying all the nine parameters being fixed by the Ramsar, the global convention on wetlands of international importance,” says K. Tulasi Rao, project coordinator of the EGREE Foundation.

Established in December 2014, the foundation has identified Coringa and its surroundings as potential Ramsar site after conducting several scientific studies.

“The region consists of rich biodiversity, fragile environment, and vulnerable population of fauna. The Forest Department is expected to forward the file to the Centre, which has to recommend the site for including in the Ramsar convention,” Dr. Rao explains.

Once included in the Ramsar site, the region could get support from organisations such as Birdlife International, International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Water Management Institute, Wetlands International, and the WWF International for protecting the

flora and fauna.

“It is not against industrial development in the region. But, somehow, the State government is not responding in a positive manner,” says Dr. Rao.

Highlighting the need for protecting the wetlands, president of the Society for Promotion of Integrated Coastal Areas Management (SPICAM) T. Rajyalakshmi observes that wildlife in the Godavari estuarine is facing several challenges.

“The rapid industrial development along the coast is changing the shape of Hope Island. Something has to be done to protect the natural resource, which is in danger,” she says. The forest officials, however, are not available for comment.

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