

World Monuments Fund Announces New Historic Revitalization Project to Address India's Growing Water Crisis

*Project aims to restore and recover traditional water systems, augmenting and strengthening
depleting resources and ensuring increased access to water*

NEW YORK, NY, February 14, 2022– World Monuments Fund (WMF) announced today the launch of a major initiative to address the growing water crisis for communities across India through the revitalization of traditional water management systems and the reinforcement of Indigenous knowledge.

From water contamination to the destruction of watersheds, damage to traditional water bodies has compromised access to water. In association with Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS), WMF India is working with local partners to address the issue. The Historic Water Bodies of India is a long-term project to identify and restore not just structures but in fact address the environmental issues around water access. This project builds on WMF's inclusion of the Historic Water Systems of the Deccan Plateau on the 2020 World Monuments Watch.

Access to water bodies was once a central consideration for the settlement and survival of any civilization. In recent decades, with intense development pressures and the advent of piped water supplies into cities, these structures have been marginalized and fallen into decay. This partnership reinforces a national call to recover historic water bodies across India. In addition, with the impact of climate change there is a far greater need to safeguard ground water and watersheds as part of our commitment to ensure water access in the future. WMF India's partnership with TCS will address these issues at select sites across the country.

Addressing the impacts of climate change through heritage preservation has become an increasingly important priority for WMF. In 2020, WMF made climate change a pillar of the 2022 World Monuments Watch, which will launch a new series of projects demonstrating strategies for climate change mitigation. The Historic Water Bodies of India project presents an opportunity to work at the intersection of contemporary issues, including the impacts of urbanization and climate change on access to clean water.

“As climate change continues to intensify around the world, impacting our built environment and the people who depend on it, World Monuments Fund India is committed to working with communities to develop solutions to mitigate the negative impacts, securing access to water through conservation and management will contribute significantly,” said Amita Baig, WMF India Executive Director. “Our work on the Historic Water Bodies of India is an example of this. We are delighted to partner with Tata Consultancy Services and look forward to developing this important initiative aimed at increasing access to clean water for communities across India.”

The overall scope of this project includes development of a comprehensive repository of information on traditional water systems and associated structures in India that will inform selection of future rehabilitation projects. Once rehabilitated, these functional water management systems can dramatically improve community access to clean water.

In the first phase of the project, all available data on the traditional water systems across India will be studied to produce an overview of the country's various systems. This study is the first step toward recognizing the importance of India's traditional water systems and assessing their extent. The data gathered will highlight gaps in documentation and help define next steps.

The research in these preliminary phases will allow WMF to identify sites that require action, while the final phase will determine which of those water bodies and systems can be restored and, with effective management, contribute significantly to address local needs. Primary research, site surveys, and analysis will result in associated conservation plans.

Historically, forts and settlements around water bodies were completely dependent on captive water systems like rivers and lakes or built systems like wells and tanks. Over time, these built systems (like those in Burhanpur, Bidar, and Bijapur) became more elaborate, made up of a combination of wells and underground water channels, and protected watersheds.

World Monuments Fund in India

India has among the widest range of historic monuments in a single geographic region. Celebrating the incredible diversity of the country's heritage has been central to World Monuments Fund's (WMF) work in India over 25 years, safeguarding not only the most endangered sites but also those which have cherished pride of place within communities.

WMF's first engagement in India began in 1996 after placing the Taj Mahal on the World Monuments Watch, which was quoted in the preamble to the Supreme Court of India's landmark judgment highlighting international concern for the site. From raising awareness of the threats facing this architectural wonder to conserving one of the most important surviving early Tibetan Buddhist temples of the Ladakh region, WMF has worked to ensure the future of India's most seminal and personal heritage landmarks. In 2015, India became the most recent entry to WMF's global network, deepening the organization's commitment to supporting heritage initiatives throughout the country.

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About World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's most treasured places to enrich people's lives and build mutual understanding across cultures and communities. The organization is headquartered in New York City with offices and affiliates in Cambodia, India, Peru, Portugal, Spain, and the UK. Since 1965, our global team of experts has preserved the world's diverse cultural heritage using the highest international standards at more than 700 sites in 112 countries. Partnering with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF draws on heritage to address some of today's most pressing challenges: climate change, underrepresentation, imbalanced tourism, and post-crisis recovery. With a commitment to the people

who bring places to life, WMF embraces the potential of the past to create a more resilient and inclusive society.

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