Close to the Last Drop

India’s groundwater is dwindling fast

The use of irrigation in India has skyrocketed in recent decades, and the country’s government acknowledges that some areas are depleting groundwater unsustainably. Now, a study in *Nature* reports just how much water is being lost.

Groundwater levels are dropping by about 4 centimeters per year, the researchers estimate, or 17.7 cubic kilometers annually in three northern Indian states. The net amount of groundwater lost between August 2002 and October 2008 was 109 cubic kilometers, almost three times the volume of the US’ Lake Mead. The team based their numbers on satellite observations of the area and hydrological modelling.

Rainfall was fairly typical during the study period, suggesting that irrigation and other human use are the most probable culprits, the authors say. Unless depletion is brought under control, they warn, the region could suffer agricultural declines and water shortages. Pakistan also relies on groundwater for its crops, raising the possibility that conflict over shared aquifers could add to political strife between the two countries. – Roberta
Kwok


Image © nauris_h, iStockPhoto.com

Filed Under Economics and conservation, Fresh water, Socio-political issues | 

Email This Post

Comments

Leave a Reply

Name (required)

Email Address (required)

Website

Submit Comment

· Blogroll

- Audubon Magazine Blog
- Climate Progress
- Conservation Letters
- Conservation Today
- ConservationBytes
- Dot Earth
- Earth Portal
- Eco-Compass
- EcoTone
- EcoWordly
- Mongabay
- OnEarth
- RealClimate
- Society of Environmental Journalists
- The Nature Conservancy Blog
- Yale Environment 360

· Search by Journal Title

- African Journal of Ecology
- American Naturalist
- Animal Conservation
- Austral Ecology
- Biological Conservation
- Biology Letters