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Biology



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[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

Source: Rodell, M., I. Velicogna, and J.S. Famiglietti. 2009. Satellite-based estimates of groundwater depletion in India. *Nature* DOI: [10.1038/nature08238](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature08238)

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