

# Deepar Beel breathes easy after eco-sensitive zone notification

A rail line and a garbage dump threaten Assam Ramsar site

**RAHUL KARMAKAR**  
GUWAHATI

On August 25, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified the eco-sensitive zone of Deepar Beel Wildlife Sanctuary on the southwestern edge of Guwahati.

Romila Boro, a sexagenarian resident of Chakardeo, the sanctuary's "guardian village", hopes the notification will bail the constricted wetlands out. But she is sad that the "good news" came eight years too late.

It was in 2014 that her husband Koliya Boro was run over by a train while trying to stop it to prevent hitting an approaching herd of elephants. He was one of the earliest conservationists of the area. "The zonation should help, but Deepar Beel's water has become toxic and lost many of its aquatic plants that elephants would feed on. The wetlands



**Cause for concern:** A view of the railway track that cuts through the Deepar Beel Wildlife Sanctuary. ■RITU RAJ KONWAR

can breathe easier only if the railway track is diverted," said Chakardeo's dairy farmer and green guard Pramod Kalita.

Deepar Beel is one of the largest freshwater lakes in Assam and the State's only Ramsar Site, besides being an Important Bird Area.

The wetlands have for decades been threatened by a railway track – set to be doubled and electrified – on its southern rim, a garbage dump and encroachment

for human habitation and commercial units.

The wetlands expand up to 30 sq. km in summer and reduces to about 10 sq. km in winter. The wildlife sanctuary measures 4.1 sq. km within this wetland.

The notification specified an area "to an extent varying from 294 metres to 16.32 km" as the eco-sensitive zone with the total area being 148.9767 sq. km.

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