Peru has designated the Estuario de Virrilá, located in the Sechura Desert, as its 14th Wetland of International Importance (no. 2455 on the List of Wetlands of International Importance).

The Site is a unique ecosystem formed of mangroves, intertidal marshes, extensive sandy beaches and shallow marine waters. It covers over 5,644 hectares, and hosts threatened species listed on the IUCN Red List such as the vulnerable Andean condor (Vultur gryphus) and longtail stingray (Hypanus longus), and endangered species such as the green turtle (Chelonia mydas) and the Peruvian tern (Sternula lorata).

The estuary also provides shelter and food to a considerable diversity of species, including 132 species of birds such as the Franklin’s gull (Leucophaeus pipixcan), the Peruvian pelican (Pelecanus thagus) and the Chilean flamingo (Phoenicopterus chilensis). It is an important migration site for Nearctic birds with up to 30 species of migratory shorebirds whose life cycle in the southern hemisphere depends on key sites such as the estuary. Within this group of species, the site hosts the largest concentration in Peru of marbled godwit (Limosa fedoa), and an exceptional concentration of Hudsonian godwit (Limosa haemastica).

The Site also provides important ecosystem services for the local populations that depend on small-scale fisheries. It is also an area for recreation and ecotourism due to its unique landscape and high biodiversity. The main threats are overfishing and pollution from rubbish and solid waste as well as industrial effluents.

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