Syllabus subtopic:

- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.
- Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability

Prelims and Mains focus: about the new guidelines for sand mining and its significance; about illegal sand mining in India and govt’s efforts to curb it; about NGT

News: Following a series of orders by the National Green Tribunal in 2018, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF) has for the first time released guidelines to monitor and check illegal sand mining in the country.

Background

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 has empowered state governments to make rules to prevent illegal mining, transportation and storage of minerals.

- But in the recent past, it has been observed that there was a large number of illegal mining cases in the country and in some cases, many of the officers lost their lives while executing their duties to curb illegal mining.

- Illegal and uncontrolled illegal mining leads to loss of revenue to the State and degradation of the environment.

Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines 2016

- While the MoEF has already put in place the Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines 2016, which focus on the management of sand mining in India, officials say that there is an urgent need to have guidelines for effective enforcement of regulatory provisions and their monitoring.
While the Sustainable Sand Mining Guidelines, 2016, require the preparation of District Survey Reports (DSR), which is an important initial step before grant of mining lease, the government has found that the DSRs carried out by state and district administrations are often not comprehensive enough, allowing space for illegal mining.

The new guidelines, therefore, list a detailed procedure of how the DSRs are to be made, including the development of an inventory, for the first time, of river bed material and other sand sources in the district.

About the new guidelines

- The Enforcement and Monitoring Guidelines for Sand Mining 2020 released by the Ministry this month include directions to states to carry out river audits, put detailed survey reports of all mining areas online and in the public domain, conduct replenishment studies of river beds, constantly monitor mining with drones, aerial surveys, ground surveys and set up dedicated task forces at district levels.

- The guidelines also push for online sales and purchase of sand and other riverbed materials to make the process transparent.

- They propose night surveillance of mining activity through night-vision drones.

- The enforcement guidelines focus on the “effective monitoring of sand mining from the identification of sand mineral sources to its dispatch and end-use by consumers and the general public and looks at a uniform protocol for the whole country”.

- The need for replenishment study for river bed sand is also required in order to “nullify the adverse impacts arising due to excessive sand extraction”. No riverbed mining will be allowed during the monsoon.

- In cases where rivers become district boundaries or state boundaries, the
districts or states sharing the boundary shall constitute the combined task force for monitoring of mined materials, mining activity and participate in the preparation of District Survey Reports (DSR) by providing appropriate inputs.

- **Detailed survey** needs to be carried out for quantification of minerals and the demand and supply of the riverbed material through market survey, including the future demand for the next five years.

- The guidelines also push for the sale and purchase of sand and river bed material (RBM) online to make the process more transparent.

- The 2020 guidelines are to be enforced simultaneously with the Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines, 2016, but in instances where the two sets of guidelines may seem to be in conflict, the new set will hold legal precedence.