Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Prelims and Mains focus: about the tiger population stats across the country; about NTCA: functions and significance

News: For the first time in the past three years, the number of tiger deaths in a year in the country has been less than 100.

Context:

- According to data from the Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC), there were 84 cases of tiger deaths in the country and 11 cases of seizures (in which a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities). Both put together, the number of tiger deaths in 2019 was 95.

- In 2018, the number of tiger deaths recorded was 100 (93 mortalities and seven seizures). The number was 115 (98 mortalities and 17 seizures) in 2017, and 122 (101 mortalities and 21 seizures) in 2016.

Significance

- These figures should be seen in the context that tiger numbers in the country were growing.
- The last tiger census report, released in July 2019, had placed the number of tigers in India at 2,967, up by a third when compared with the numbers reported in 2014.

Reasons for reduction in tiger deaths

- The reduced numbers of tiger mortalities are because of surveillance, good management of Tiger Reserves and a lot of awareness and education programmes on tiger conservation.
• Using technology to maintain surveillance on tigers has also come as an added advantage.

**Tiger deaths across states**

• **Madhya Pradesh**, which has the highest number of tigers in the country (526, as per the last census), recorded the most number of cases (31) of tiger deaths.
• This was followed by **Maharashtra**, which reported 18 deaths. **Karnataka**, another State with high tiger population, recorded 12 deaths, and **Uttarakhand** recorded ten deaths.
• **Tamil Nadu** recorded seven cases of tiger deaths.
• Deaths were also recorded from **nontiger bearing States like Gujarat**, where a tiger had strayed into the State and died.

**Way ahead**

With the increase in tiger numbers, more areas in the country need to be declared Tiger Reserves. Currently, there are 50 Tiger Reserves in India with an area of about 73,000 sq. km.

**About National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**

• It is a **statutory body** under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act.

• It has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisories/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.

**Functions**

• Ensuring normative standards in tiger reserve management
• Preparation of reserve specific tiger conservation plan
• Laying down annual/audit report before Parliament
• Instituting State level Steering Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister and establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation.
• According approval for declaring new Tiger Reserves.