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

News: Ministry of rural development (MHRD) releases fifth edition of Wasteland Atlas. The last edition was published in 2011

Prelims focus: Key findings
Mains focus: About wastelands- causes, concerns and how to improve them.

What is new in this year's atlas?

- It takes into account **12.08 MHa of unmapped area of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) for the first time.**
- The new wastelands mapping exercise was **carried out by NRSC using the Indian Remote Sensing Satellite data.**

Background:

Department of land resources in collaboration with National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Department of Space has published Wastelands Atlases of India – 2000, 2005, 2010 & 2011 editions.

Key findings:

1. Spatial extent of wastelands in India is 55.76 Mha (16.96 per cent of geographical area of the country i.e. 328.72 Mha) for the year 2015-16 as compared to 56.60 Mha (17.21 per cent) in the year 2008-09.
2. As per the Atlas, during this period 1.45 Mha of wastelands are converted into non wastelands categories.
3. India with 2.4 per cent of total land area of the world is supporting 18 per cent of the world’s population. The per capita availability of agriculture land in India is 0.12 ha whereas world per capita agriculture land is 0.29 ha.

Significance of the atlas:

Unprecedented pressure on the land beyond its carrying capacity is resulting into degradation of lands in the country. Therefore, robust geospatial information on wastelands assumes significance and effectively helpful in rolling back the wastelands for productive use through various land development programmes/schemes.