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AN OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF RIVERBED MINING IN HIMALAYAN TERRAIN OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

Himalayas and its for thills are a treasure house of minerals being exploited by mankind since time immemorial. With the advancement of society, the methods of extraction of minerals has improved from traditional to highly mechanized, which has resulted in extraction of the minerals at a pace much faster than the pace at which nature recovers and thus making the situation irreversible resulting in over exploitation. The unplanned and unregulated large-scale mining of sand, gravel and stones from riverbeds and riverbanks are not devoid of environmental and social impacts. Riverbed mining in the Himalayan terrain has caused erosion and has left the river-plains much more vulnerable to flooding because it allows loose landmass to be washed downstream, especially during the monsoon season. These can severely impact the ecological balance of a river and damage flora, fauna and the riparian habitats. The fast pace of economic development has promoted unabated riverbed mining. Riverbed mining in an unscientific manner leads to severe environmental problems to the river ecosystems that obviously need immediate attention and corrective measures. Lack of adequate scientific studies on this environmentally sensitive activity is a major setback in decision making and also creating awareness among the people at different levels. This paper presents a review of various mining methods, problems and issues associated with riverbed mining, mining plans and recommendations for extraction of construction material in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: Riverbed mining, environmental impact, flooding, ecological balance, corrective measures.