



Effects of Overpopulation: Sprawl and Development

“Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees, then names the streets after them.”
- Bill Vaughan, American industry author

Here at Negative Population Growth (NPG), we see how many areas of the United States struggle every day to deal with the terrible side effects of growth and expansion. As our population soars to numbers far above what we would consider manageable, the loss of valuable farmland, forests, and other rural spaces remains a serious problem. Research on this topic reveals the following shocking facts!

Overview of Problem

- Between 1970 and 1990, the United States lost almost 20 million acres of rural land to development, with residential and commercial centers consuming 400,000 acres per year, according to the organization American Rivers.
- Sprawl City reports the rate of rural land lost to development in the 1990s was about 2.2 million acres per year. If this rate continues to the year 2050 – when today’s toddlers are middle-aged – the United States will have lost an additional 110 million acres of rural countryside. That’s about equal to the combined areas of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia. If the rates of agricultural land loss that have prevailed in recent years continue to 2050, the nation will have lost over 55 million of its remaining 375 million acres of cropland...

According to American Rivers’ *What Is Sprawl?* report:

- In central Puget Sound, population rose by 38 percent between 1970 and 1990, but the amount of land developed in the region over the same two decades was 87 percent, with profound impacts of water resources and quality. Of California’s 350 groundwater basins, forty are being seriously overdrafted today, and the state could face a water deficit of 2-8 million-acre feet by 2020.
- The East faces serious sprawl consequences as well. According to a Sierra Club study, the East is home to the four most sprawl-threatened large cities in the nation - Atlanta, Georgia; St. Louis, Missouri; Washington, D.C; and Cincinnati, Ohio. In just two years, Vermont, historically known for its strong rural legacy, lost ten percent of its farmland to development.
- Disorderly development threatens to erase the progress made in restoring the Chesapeake Bay, where sprawl eats up 90,000 acres of land in the Bay states every year. According to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, sprawl produces 5-7 times as much sediment and phosphorous runoff as forestland and nearly twice as much polluted runoff as compacted development.

From the report *How Bad is Sprawl?* on the website www.sprawlcity.org:

- Over a 20-year period, the 100 largest Urbanized Areas sprawled out over an additional 14,545 square miles. That was more than 9 million acres of natural habitats, farmland and other rural space that were covered over by the asphalt, buildings and sub-divisions of suburbia. And that was just for the half of Americans who live in those 100 cities.

The USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program finds:

- On average, prime and important farmlands are being converted at a rate two to four times that of other lands. Based on NRI urban and built-up data for the 1980s, 46 percent of the land converted to urban and built-up uses comes from cropland and pasture, while 38 and 14 percent comes from forest land and range land, respectively.
- Once developed, productive farmland's rich topsoil is effectively lost forever, placing future food security for the Nation at risk.

Population and the Environment, a fact sheet from the Population Connection, states:

- While the number of people living in 58 US metropolitan areas rose 80% between 1950 and 1990, the land covered by those areas expanded 305%. This urban sprawl not only impinges on wildlife and ecosystems on the encroached land; it affects life everywhere through higher carbon dioxide levels and increased global climate temperatures due to greater commutes. The continued effects of our sprawling, car dependent cities include rises in sea level, harsher and more frequent heat waves, and more serious and potentially lethal health effects from pollution.

The *Farming on the Edge Report* from American Farmland Trust reveals:

- Less than one-fifth of U.S. land is high quality, and we are losing this finest land to development at an accelerating rate.
- Every single minute of every day, America loses two acres of farmland. From 1992-1997, we converted to developed uses more than six million acres of agricultural land – an area the size of Maryland.
- We lost farm and ranch land 51 percent faster in the 1990's than in the 1980's. The rate of loss from 1992-1997, 1.2 million acres per year, was 51 percent high than from 1982-1992.

In order to best protect our natural surroundings from sprawl and many other serious environmental problems, we must first address the true problem – POPULATION GROWTH.

Negative Population Growth – NPG – is a national membership organization founded in 1972 to educate the American public and political leaders about the detrimental effects of overpopulation on our environment, resources and quality of life. NPG advocates a smaller and truly sustainable United States population accomplished through voluntary incentives for smaller families and reduced immigration levels.

We are pleased to provide to you this fact sheet as part of our *Effects of Overpopulation* educational series. We sincerely hope you will use this information in your classroom in order to educate your students regarding the detrimental effects of an overpopulated nation. We also welcome your feedback on how to make this series more effective in reaching today's youth.