



Effects of Overpopulation: Wildlife and Habitat Destruction

“Zoos are becoming facsimiles - or perhaps caricatures - of how animals once were in their natural habitat. If the right policies toward nature were pursued, we would need no zoos at all.” - Michael J. Fox, American actor

As population grows at a record pace, the threat to wildlife and their natural habitats remains a grave concern. At NPG, we recognize that the only way to truly protect our wildlife from further damage is to reduce overall human population levels. Research on this topic reveals the following startling facts.

Population and the Environment, a report from the National Wildlife Federation finds:

- The unprecedented rate at which the human population has grown since the beginning of the industrial revolution has had immeasurable impacts on the ability of non-human species to survive. More people using more resources results in less and less suitable habitat for wildlife, pushing many species to the brink of extinction. While extinction of species has been a normal phenomenon throughout history, today we are experiencing a mass extinction comparable to that of the dinosaurs where nearly 20 plant and animal species become extinct every hour.
- Population growth and resulting human activity is encroaching upon migratory pathways critical to the survival of such varied species as the Humpback Whale, Ruby-Throated Hummingbird, Cerulean Warbler, Arroyo Toad, and Monarch Butterfly, among others.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s report, *History of Florida's Conservation Lands*, states:

- Since the 1950s, Florida's population has risen at an annual rate of approximately four percent. In the [past] 50 years, more than eight million acres of forest and wetland habitats (about 24 percent of the state) have been cleared to accommodate the expanding human population. In 1990, about 19 acres per hour of forest, wetland, and agricultural land [were] being converted for urban uses. Because of this growth, Florida’s ecosystems are now considered the most endangered of all fifty states.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:

- Destruction, degradation, and fragmentation of habitat is the driving force behind today's decline in species and biodiversity. Impacts to habitat can be caused directly by such activities as the clearing of forests to grow crops or build homes, or indirectly, for example, by the introduction of invasive species or increased pollution run-off from yards and fields.
- Numerous fish and wildlife species and their habitats within the Great Lakes Basin face serious threats from human population growth and the development and disturbance that are often a consequence of growth. Because coastal areas have the highest population densities in the country and are expected to face continuing population pressures, there is a strong need for action to protect and restore coastal habitats.

- Water in the Chihuahuan Desert on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border is both crucial and scarce. As human settlements and populations grew, more and more water was diverted from natural resources to irrigate fields and supply towns—today more than 90 percent of the Rio Grande River is diverted for irrigation. The San Pedro River is one of the last free-flowing rivers in the desert's northern realms. With virtually intact forests along its banks, this river provides one of the most important migratory bird habitats in North America. Here, riparian forests host as many as 5 million migrating birds every year. (Taken from *The Chihuahuan Desert: A Life-filled Landscape*, by Christopher Williams.)

Population and Habitat: Making the Connection, a publication by Audubon, finds:

- The destruction of the natural world we see across the globe today is “fallout” from the human population explosion that has occurred over the course of the last 50 years. In order to satisfy the needs and wants of ever-increasing numbers of people, humans chop down forests, bulldoze mountains, divert streams, spray poisons, introduce invasive species, overharvest wild animal populations, and pave over land upon which wild creatures depend.

From the report, *Unwelcome (Human) Neighbors*, by Natural Resources Defense Council:

- Roads and sprawling neighborhoods are replacing pristine wildlife habitats at an alarming pace, putting the survival and reproduction of plants and animals at risk. In just the last few decades, rapidly growing human settlements have consumed large amounts of land in our country, while wildlife habitats have shrunk, fragmented, or disappeared altogether. If the current land use pattern -- expansion of built areas at rates much faster than population growth -- continues, sprawl could become the problem for U.S. wildlife in the 21st century.
- Today, this rapid growth continues. Moreover, some of the fastest growth is occurring far beyond our urban areas, in still-rural communities 60 to 70 miles from metropolitan beltways. Such exurbs already account for 60 million people and one-quarter of the recent population growth of the lower 48 states. In the exurbs, developments are often far away from each other, connected only by a system of highways and roads. Such "leapfrog developments" exacerbate the fragmentation of wildlife habitats.

Putting the Bite on Planet Earth: Rapid Human Population Growth is Devouring Global Natural Resources, by Don Hinrichson, appearing on the National Wildlife Federation, states:

- Biologists have catalogued 1.7 million species and cannot even estimate how many species remain to be documented. The total could be 5 million, 30 million or even more. Yet, we are driving thousands of species yearly to extinction through thoughtless destruction of habitat.

The Animal Protection Institute reports:

- Countless wild animals are displaced by urban sprawl and habitat fragmentation, which sometimes lead to conflicts between people and wildlife.

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.