

NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

Press Release

For immediate release

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President Don Mann Releases New Paper on U.S. Waterways and Population *Population Growth Continues to Threaten Fragile Waterways Across the Country*

Alexandria, VA (August 9, 2018) – Americans have a deep and historic love for their rivers, estuaries, and lakes says NPG President Don Mann. But are they loving them to death? They place enormous and at times conflicting demands on the nation’s tens of thousands of waterways: pure water for drinking and industrial use, plant and home sites, inexpensive bulk shipping, fishing and boating recreation, expanding population centers, and even spiritual and aesthetic values such as permanence, beauty, and serenity.

Mann, along with many Americans, asks where do the country and its waterways stand more than four decades after the historic Clean Water Act of 1972 (CWA) – and the addition of more than 100 million people since then. He calls attention to a relevant new NPG Forum Paper, [*Population Threats to America’s Rivers, Estuaries and Lakes*](#) by NPG Researcher Christopher Daly.

Mann and the author hail the environmental spirit and good intentions of the CWA, and its considerable remediation of U.S. waterways, but ask whether these gains have been diminished by 45 years of rapid population growth. Will the U.S. commitment to the health of its waterways survive in an era of tight budgets, anti-regulatory politics, the addition of 100 million or more residents by 2060, climate change, and continued addiction to the creed of “growth at all costs?” In defending its vulnerable waterways against the ravages of “progress,” is the U.S. “shoveling sand against the tide?”

Given the magnitude of America’s waterways, the author’s brief paper examines these dilemmas and the remedies applied by looking at the experience of a small number of representative case studies. Not all of his examples are large rivers: he examines the Connecticut (New England) and Cape Fear (North Carolina) rivers, both struggling with multi-source pollution and intense current and prospective urbanization of their watersheds.

The “Mighty” Mississippi and the Colorado are examined. Both are long rivers with huge watersheds. But they vary wildly in the volume of their flows, thus facing critical but quite different threats. The Mississippi’s massive agricultural and feed lot run-off imperils water-quality of 31 states and now even threatens the Gulf of Mexico with a growing 6,000 square-mile hypoxic “dead zone” off the Louisiana and Texas coasts. The Colorado has water quality and related environmental problems. But its gravest is in allocating an insufficient flow to fully meet the needs now and increasingly in the future of the 30 million (and rapidly growing) population in its watershed as well as the U.S. commitment of flow to Mexico.

The author discusses two major estuaries, the San Francisco and Chesapeake Bays, that are beset by population and economic growth in their watersheds which destroy wet lands and devastate sea creatures. Both bays also face diminishing area due to the intrusion of development into the bays themselves.

The U.S.'s largest body of fresh water, the Great Lakes, shares in varying degrees the problems of agricultural, mining, and industrial run off and creeping coastal urbanization. Algae blooms from farm run-offs of phosphorous are a particularly severe plague for Lake Erie and its primary users, a threat to the health and drinking water of 11 million people.

Conserving lake water for the future also faces special political challenges, Mann notes: one is excessive draw-downs by littoral states for inland communities or suburban growth. A threatening problem is continued urging in thirsty western states for engineering schemes to divert Great Lakes waters to those dry lands.

For the author, rationally protecting and conserving our waterways is a nearly intractable problem given the profusion of federal, state, and local policy makers and non-profits with differing interests and varying perspectives on goals, methods, urgency and costs to be borne. This is a particularly dysfunctional factor in the host of multi-state compacts sharing responsibility for a single watershed, such as the Connecticut, Colorado, and Mississippi rivers, the Chesapeake Bay, and the Great Lakes. Agreed funding and project commitments by member states with less at stake are at times not honored.

Managing the nation's water resources in an ultra-pluralistic federal system is unlikely to get any easier as the U.S. population climbs steadily to over four-hundred million water users.

Founded in 1972, NPG is a national nonprofit membership organization dedicated to educating the American public and political leaders regarding the damaging effects of population growth. We believe that our nation is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long-range carrying capacity of its resources and environment. NPG advocates the adoption of its [Proposed National Population Policy](#), with the goal of eventually stabilizing U.S. population at a sustainable level – far lower than today's. We do not simply identify the problems – we propose solutions. For more information, visit our website at www.NPG.org, follow us on Facebook @[NegativePopulationGrowth](#) or follow us on Twitter @[npg_org](#).