

Is Immigration An Environmental Issue?

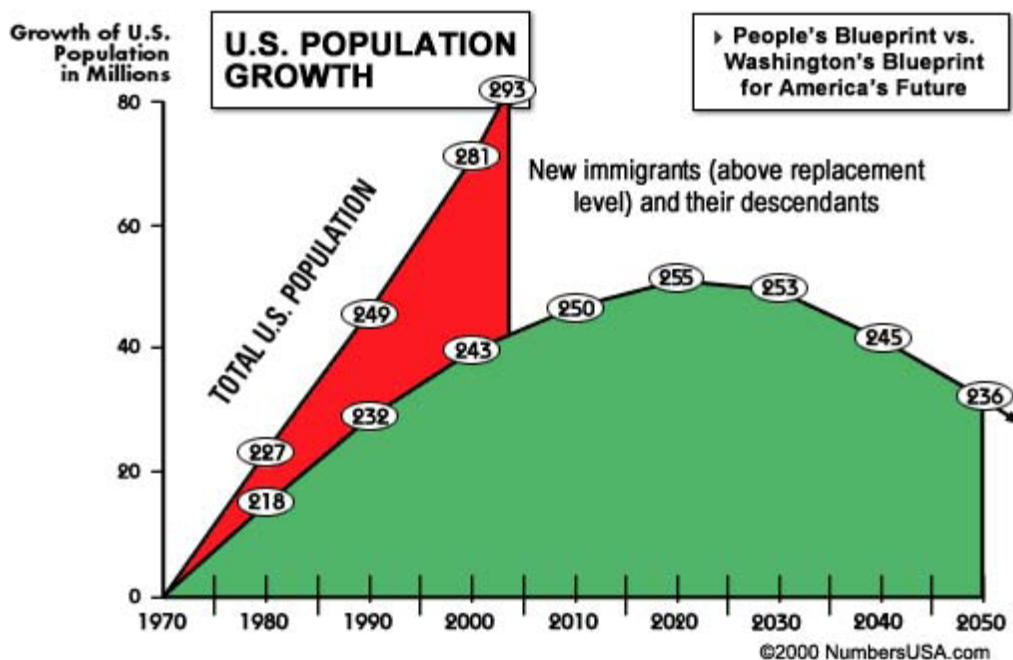
Immigration, especially illegal immigration, has become a very hot topic. It's a complicated issue with many aspects and even more opinions. For some, the issues are economic such as workers for 'jobs American's won't do' or wage depression depending on your perspective. For others it's human interests such as, depending on your perspective, human rights for migrants or quality of life for citizens. Still others see it as an issue of racism. Some feel that anyone opposed to immigration must be a xenophobe or white supremacist. Others point to speeches by Latino supremacists calling for 'reconquista' or re-conquering the Southwestern US using immigration to achieve numerical superiority for 'la Raza' ('the [Latino] Race'). Sadly, there are racists on both sides.

We're missing the biggest issue of all

One aspect of immigration that is rarely mentioned in the media, in Washington or, most bizarre, even by mainstream environmental groups like the Sierra Club, is the environmental impact of mass-immigration. Immigration affects our environment because it is now the **main cause by far** of US population growth.

Are you aware how fast the US is growing? Most people aren't, although they frequently complain about the consequences. Consider the following:

- **200,000,000** – Approximate US population during the first Earth Day in 1970.
- **300,000,000** – Projected US population by October 2006 – That's a hundred million or 50% increase in just 36 years.
- **420,000,000** – Projected US population in 2050 assuming current immigration policy. Current immigration bills in the Senate would push it well past that. US population could reach 1 billion by the end of the century.
- **New York City+Los Angeles+Chicago+Houston:** equivalent US growth since the 2000 census (281,421,906).
- Building a new Sacramento every 12 months: construction required for population growth in California.
- The United States has the highest growth rates of any industrialized country in the world.



The lower **green** section of the graphic is the future that millions of Americans began to create in the early 1970s when they decided -- on average -- to have replacement-size families (about two children per couple). But the **red** shows the extra population Congress added through above-replacement-level immigration.

Connecting Cause & Effect

Have you ever complained about loss of open space and farmland? Do you complain about traffic congestion? Pollution? Crowds, even at our national parks? Consider the following:

- **11 lanes** – width of the traffic jam between Los Angeles and New York if the net number of cars added to US roads since 2000 were lined up. That's only 6 years of growth.
- **19 years** – approximate time until population growth and conversion of farmland to development at present rates results in the US no longer being able to feed itself. The US will then need to import more food than we export and will compete with poorer countries for food in addition to energy and other resources.
- **100,000 acres** – Florida farmland lost on average each year from 1974 to 2002
- **10 million acres** – forest area converted to housing since 1980 -- an area twice as large as Yellowstone, Everglades, Shenandoah, and Yosemite National Parks combined.
- **2 million** – the approximate number of new houses needed every year to keep up with US population growth. How many trees need to be cut down each year to build 2 million houses?
- **610,246** – the number of new students Florida projects in the next ten years
- **Going Dry** – 50% of US drinking water and most agricultural water come from underground aquifers. Every day we permanently remove 3.2 billion gallons of water from these aquifers. By 2020, the Ogallala aquifer (used for farming from Texas to S. Dakota) may lose almost 2/3 of its 1974 volume. As it shrinks, so does the nation's food supply.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and only Replace!

We talk a lot on Earth Day about the three R's. They're great ideas. But they don't seem to be applied to population. **Reducing** consumption while wildly **increasing** population nullifies the benefits of reduced consumption. **Reuse?** Consider housing. A stable population would reuse housing from generation to generation (think Europe). A fast-growing population must have armies of bulldozers constantly at work. **Recycle?** A good idea for sure, but it still consumes energy. Even a society that recycles aggressively will consume twice as much energy to do it, if population doubles.

Do Not Blame Immigrants, Blame Congress & Bush

Concern for the environment need not mean being against immigrants. The US can still have immigration, just not at the current rate. The keyword is *sustainability*. A sustainable immigration policy would match immigration with emigration of about 200,000/year. **Replacement immigration and replacement-size families are a sustainable scenario.** Today's excessive immigration policy brings in between 1-2 million immigrants (legal + illegal)/year - that the environment cannot sustain.

President Bush is not known for his environmental concern and he promotes what amounts to an open-borders immigration policy. Most Congressional immigration legislation has also fostered population growth. In the current debate on illegal immigration, for example, almost no discussion in Washington informs the public of the environmental consequences of these population growth policies. Call your Congress members and the White House. Tell them to demand an **Environmental Impact Study** be a required part of any legislation that increases our population.

- U.S. House switchboard: (202) 225-3121 U.S. Senate switchboard: 202-224-3121
- White House opinion line: (202) 456-1111
- Visit NumbersUSA.com thinkpopulation.org and uscongress-enviroscore.org for information and action.
- Read Collapse by Jared Diamond.

OVERPOPULATION – IT'S ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE #1

“Without stopping population growth, every environmental cause is a lost cause”

FLORIDIANS FOR A SUSTAINABLE POPULATION www.flsuspop.org