

Biocapacity

Population growth in the United States has a far greater environmental impact than growth in most other nations.

- The average per capita [ecological footprint worldwide](#) is 2.75 gha (i.e. global hectares,¹ or roughly five American football fields² of productive land to support one person), which would fall between the national per capita footprint of [Samoa and Romania](#). To be sustainable, given the current global population, the worldwide average would have to be that of the average Iraqi's 1.74 gha (three and a quarter football fields).³
- The [average American's ecological footprint is 8.1 gha, or about 15 football fields](#).⁴ That's what it takes to provide the raw materials and products required to sustain the average American's lifestyle.
- According to [Gallup](#), another 160 million adults around the world would migrate to the U.S. if they had the opportunity.⁵ At average American consumption rates, that would equal an additional ecological footprint of 2,400,000,000 football fields.

The United States is running an [ecological deficit](#), exceeding its [biocapacity](#).⁶

- The U.S. meets its [consumption demand](#) by taking resources from future generations (drawing down domestic resources), and from other countries (importing resources; exporting waste).
- [Earth Overshoot](#) gives The United States a "D" grade for sustainability⁷:
 - "The rising population in the US is raising demand for infrastructure like housing, roads, water and sewer, schools, and for food."

¹ Per Global Footprint Network, "A global hectare is a biologically productive hectare with world average biological productivity for a given year." <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/resources/glossary/>

² 1 Hectares = 1.868734483664 American Football Fields

³ Wackernagel, Mathis Advancing Sustainable Production with the Ecological Footprint, Global Footprint Network, 2017, <https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/38875804.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Anita Pugliese and Julie Ray, "Nearly 900 Million Worldwide Wanted to Migrate in 2021," *Gallup*, January 24, 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/468218/nearly-900-million-worldwide-wanted-migrate-2021.aspx>

⁶ GFN. <https://data.footprintnetwork.org/#/countryTrends?cn=5001&type=BCpc.EFCpc>

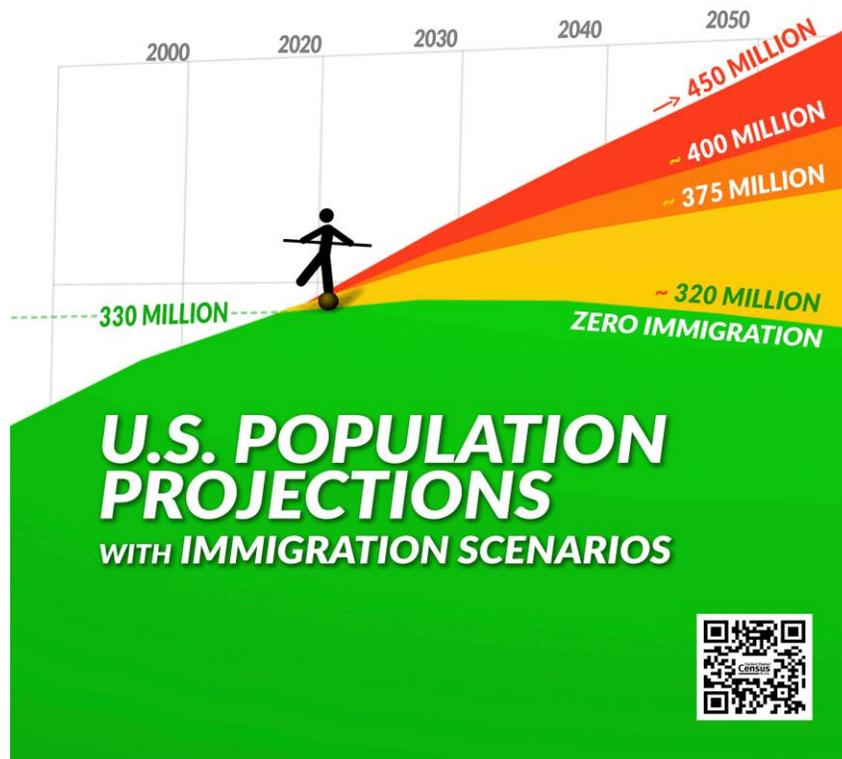
⁷ Earth Overshoot, MVP Sustainability Map, United States of America, as of July 17, 2023. <https://8billionangels.org/earthovershoot/country/USA.html>

- “The IUCN [International Union for Conservation of Nature] ranks the United States as one of the worst offenders of global biodiversity loss from its continued growth and sprawl.”⁸
- “The US is the largest annual immigrant destination in the world.”⁹

Conserving to Consume More

Millions of Americans limit their personal consumption to conserve natural resources. But Congress has set a course, through immigration policy, to ensure that the United States will [add tens of millions](#) of people between 2016-2060¹⁰:

- 81 million more American consumers by 2060 if immigration continues at current levels.
- 124 million more American consumers by 2060 if immigration increases by half.
- 53 million more American consumers by 2060 if immigration decreases by half.



⁸ IUCN Red List, Table 5. As of 2017, The United States ranks 7th worst out of all countries in total species threatened. <https://www.iucnredlist.org/statistics>

⁹ Migration Policy Institute tabulation of data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *International Migrant Stock 2020: Destination*, Table 1: International Migrant Stock at Mid-Year by Sex and by Region, Country or Area of Destination, 1990-2020. Available here: www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock. Data prior to 1990 are no longer available online.

¹⁰ Sandra Johnson, A Changing Nation: Population Projections Under Alternative Immigration Scenarios, February 2020, U.S. Census. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1146.pdf>

In doing so, Congress has negated the personal sacrifices of millions. Americans are being asked to conserve less *individually*, and yet as a nation, due to our growing population, we'll consume more *collectively*.

Population, affluence, and technology are all important factors.

- America is a wealthy nation, with tremendous access to modern luxuries. New [technologies](#) play important roles in addressing our total footprint, but the resource consumption demands of a growing population continually add an increasing burden that further compounds the problem.
- Technology can be a double-edged sword. Greater efficiency often leads to greater overall consumption (e.g. highways widened to ease congestion are in short order filled with more cars, maintaining congestion levels), and the side effects of technology such as mining for lithium, copper, and cobalt are almost always in someone's (or some critters) backyard - and frequently detrimental to the poor all over the world.
- The land loss from American population growth alone is [enormous](#). The ecological loss is [even greater](#). Americans [favor slower growth or stabilization](#)¹¹ but Congress has made that [impossible](#)¹².

"All human beings and every American — even those who are conscientious and profess to be environmentally aware — inexorably impose certain demands (or what ecologists call a "load") on the land and resources of the biosphere through consumption and waste generation (including carbon dioxide). The mere act of living with the comforts and conveniences of the modern world necessarily causes environmental impacts, which can be reduced through better technologies and more environmentally enlightened behaviors and virtues, but never entirely eliminated. No amount of wishful thinking or technical wizardry will ever erase our ecological footprint completely." - From [Sea to Sprawling Sea: Quantifying the Loss of Open Space In America](#).¹³

¹¹ Pulse Opinion Research Survey, May 15-27, 2020. *From Sea To Sprawling Sea*, Appendix G, Q11, p. G-4. <https://sprawlusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NatlSprawl.pdf#%5B%7B%22num%22%3A80%2C%22gen%22%3A0%7D%2C%7B%22name%22%3A%22FitR%22%7D%2C-75%2C178%2C686%2C768%5D>

¹² Johnson, U.S. Census (n6).

¹³ Kolankiewicz, L. with Beck, R. and Ruark, E., *From Sea to Sprawling Sea: Quantifying the Loss of Open Space in America*, NumbersUSA, 2020, p. 4. <https://sprawlusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NatlSprawl.pdf>