

# Speaker's Corner



A Speaker's Corner, made famous by the northeast corner of Hyde Park in London, is a place of open debate and discussion. Members of AWA are welcome to use this space to comment on environmental issues they are concerned about. The opinions you will see here should not be interpreted as AWA policy statements. If you would like to submit a comment for Speaker's Corner, please email your submission to me at [iurquhart@abwild.ca](mailto:iurquhart@abwild.ca). Submissions should be no more than approximately 500 words, be connected to environmental/wilderness issues in Alberta, and are subject to editorial approval.

## Humans are the problem, or "This Earth ain't big enough for all of us"

Much is written about environmental degradation and its causes. A few Albertan examples are:

- Ongoing loss of forests due to industrial scale of tree cutting. It is occurring at a faster rate than in Brazil.
- Pollution from more frequent forest fires and micro-particulates in city air are growing health problems.
- Continuing reduction of farmland as more agricultural land becomes roads, malls, factories and suburbs.
- Biodiversity decline. Numbers of woodland caribou decline because of resource extraction and new roads. In the 70s I often observed burrowing owls on Calgary-Lethbridge trips. I have not seen one for four decades. Reasons for less biodiversity are habitat loss (disappearing forests, prairie grassland, wet lands), pollution, and human activities. Insect decline is often reported. Reduced insect populations means fewer insect-eating birds and poorer pollination. Habitat loss, climate change and insecticides are factors here.
- Albertan soil quality declines with less carbon sequestration in soil, poorer soil structure, mineral depletion, resulting from intensive agriculture. Food quality (vitamin, mineral, protein content) is dropping. Irrigation often leads to soil sa-

linity, rendering soils useless.

- Disease. Over half a billion dollars were spent on fighting the pine beetles that are devastating our forests. The battle continues. Warmer winters allow beetle survival. Climate warming also increase Lyme disease, Dengue fever and malaria, carried by warm loving ticks and mosquitos.
- Oil sands operations continue with a vast area of denuded/polluted land. Levels of toxic chemicals are higher than guidelines allow. Reclamation efforts are pathetically inadequate. Now a 290 square kilometre mine is proposed near Wood Buffalo National Park, with a loss of 3,000 hectares of old growth forest and 14,000 hectares of wetlands.

Each negative environmental effect has a clear cause(s). But there is one simple underlying cause. There are too many humans on this small planet - each contributing to an increasingly impoverished, damaged, ecology and reduced biodiversity. More humans mean city growth, more pollution, roads, industry, deforestation, and faster conversion of wild land to agriculture. Calgary's population grew from 350,000 to 1.5 million in 50 years. At that rate it could be 10 million by 2100.

The primary cause of global warming is too many humans. Industry and transportation burn fossil fuels and produce greenhouse gases. Deforestation and marine pollution increase the problem by reducing

carbon dioxide sequestration. More rice fields, livestock operations, city landfills, oil/gas extraction produce more methane. The root cause of global warming is the wasteful, polluting, destructive and rapidly growing human population.

There are too many people on the Earth NOW. At 7.5 billion (perhaps 10 billion by 2100) we have greatly exceeded the Earth's carrying capacity. Earth's finite resources cannot sustain this population. Even if population stays at 7.5 billion, with current levels of industrial activity, pollution, and utilization of scarce resources we are still digging ourselves a deep hole, from which escape will be difficult. The longer we postpone dealing with the problem, the more painful and expensive it will be. As population increases so will food shortages, political unrest, terrorism and wars.

The driver of Albertan and global environmental degradation is human population growth.

The idea that there are too many humans on Earth seems to be a taboo subject. One few are willing to discuss. The notion that some yet unborn genius will dream up a way to save us all is naive and delusional.

There are many paths to attack these problems, but the simplest and most effective is to drastically reduce the number of children we produce.

- David Mayne Reid, Calgary