

Center for Environment & Population

For Embargoed Release:
August 30, 2006
1:00pm EST

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New Report: U.S. Population Reaches 300 Million- Major Environmental Impacts Show Vanishing Species, Land & Water, Climate Changes

New Canaan, CT: With U.S. population expected to reach 300 million this fall, there will be another U.S. population "first"--its *biggest ever per-capita environmental impact*, says a groundbreaking new report released today by the Center for Environment and Population (CEP).

The new "*U.S. National Report on Population and the Environment*", for the first time, documents existing scientific evidence of how the nation's dramatic population changes (such as rapid growth, suburbanization, and coastal concentrations) are linked to equally remarkable environmental changes (such as rapid land development, habitat and species loss, water pollution, and climate change).

"It's the elephant in the room that everyone recognizes, yet doesn't take seriously", said Vicky Markham, CEP's Director. "Everyday we sit in traffic congestion, see less land around us, or that haze around our cities. Yet it stops there--rarely do we look beyond the surface, or even take responsibility. This report shows *the science is in, and the trends are clear*--the U.S. population, its growth and consumption, has strong links to our nation's environmental health."

"We've become a 'supersize, metro-nation' with a fast growing population, and supersize appetites for housing, land, and resource consumption", said Markham. "This is often overlooked as attention to population factors and their environmental consequences is usually focused *outside* the nation. Yet as this report shows, it's occurring right here in the U.S.", said Ms. Markham. "Americans need to recognize *our* population's environmental impacts. We can't ignore the evidence any longer."

The "U.S. National Report on Population and the Environment" is the first publication of its kind to compile the latest scientific data and analysis in an easy-to-understand, visually compelling format on both a broad spectrum of human population trends (including growth, density, movement, age/income and related resource consumption and pollution) and their impacts on land use, freshwater, forests, biological diversity, climate change, fisheries, aquatic and other resources. U.S. national, regional and state-by-state trends, with local examples, are summarized in the concise, fact-filled, science-based report.

Key findings:

- The U.S. has become a "**supersize, metro-nation**", with a **fast growing population, and supersize appetites for housing, land, and resource consumption**. "More of more" characterizes modern day America: *more* people, *more* natural resource-use, and now, *more major impacts* on the natural systems that support American life than ever before.

- **The U.S. is the *only* industrialized nation in the world *experiencing significant population growth*.** This fact, combined in a new way in this report with data on America's high rates of resource consumption, shows how the nation has the *largest per-capita environmental impact in the world*.
- **For the first time in its history the U.S. is a "metropolitan nation"**, shifting from being primarily rural to a *primarily urban and suburban nation*. Today, 4 out of 5 Americans live in metro areas, resulting in "**sprawl**" being the **most predominant form of land-use change in the country**. Overall, land is developed twice as fast as population growth.
- **The report identifies the South and West--the nation's fastest growing *and* most populous regions (home to over half of all Americans today)--as being the nation's first "*Population & Environment Hot Spots*".** Half of the nation's fastest growing states are in vulnerable coastal ecosystems in the South, and another four are in the driest Western areas.

Additional report highlights can be found below. **PDF copy available at www.cepnet.org**. Hardcopy available on request.

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"U.S. National Report on Population and the Environment" highlights:

Population Trends:

- The U.S. is the *only* industrialized nation in the world *experiencing significant population growth*. That, combined with American's high rates of resource consumption, results in the *largest per capita environmental impact in the world*.
- For the first time in our history the U.S. is a "metropolitan nation", shifting from being primarily rural to *primarily urban and suburban*, with environmental implications across the board. Today, 80% of all Americans live in metro areas. This is linked to rapid land development and species' habitat loss.
- The *nation's population density has doubled* in the past century and it has had the *largest numerical increase ever*, with the biggest increase the addition of 30 million people in the 1990s alone.
- The *South and West are the country's most heavily populated and fastest growing regions*, and now contain over half of the entire U.S. population. The Northeast is the most densely populated region.
- Of the nation's top ten fastest-growing states, five are in the coastal South and four are in the driest parts of the West, forming the nation's vulnerable "*Population & Environment Hot Spots*".
- *Over half of all Americans live within 50 miles of the coast, in just one-fifth of its land area*. Population density on the coasts is five times that of other parts of the country. This is linked to coastal wetlands loss, damages from climate change/increased storm impacts, and pollution.
- *The number of households and house size has increased*, requiring more natural resources to build and more energy to heat or cool people than ever before.
- *Age and income both have major environmental impacts*. Today's "Baby Boomers" are the largest, wealthiest, highest resource-consuming of that age group in the nation's history, with unprecedented environmental effects. The U.S.'s highest per capita income represents both high rates of resource consumption, and increased opportunity to purchase new, higher cost, environmentally-sound goods such as energy efficient vehicles or organic food.

These "U.S. population trends" have major environmental consequences, described below:

- **Land-use:** Today, **all U.S. land is converted for development about twice the rate of population growth**. Each American effectively occupies 20% more developed land (for housing, schools, shopping, roads and other uses) than 20 years ago. The most predominant form of land use change is "sprawl"--low density development spread into suburban and rural areas, with high vehicle use and new roads, shops and other infrastructures.
- **Water:** America is among the world's top ten in per capita water withdrawal, with **each American using three times that of the world average**. About 40% of the nation's rivers, 46% of lakes, and 50% of the estuaries are too polluted for fishing and swimming. Over half of the nation's wetlands are lost, now mainly due to urban/suburban development and land use change for agriculture.
- **Biodiversity:** About 6,700 known plant and animal species are considered at risk of extinction in the U.S. **Almost 1,000 species are listed by the U.S. government as endangered, and 300 as threatened (over twice the number listed a decade ago), mainly (85%) from habitat loss and alteration**. Half of the continental U.S. can no longer support its original vegetation. The biodiversity decline, called the "sixth mass extinction" in the Earth's history, is for the first time being attributed primarily to human activity.
- **Forests:** Today nearly three times as many people are being supported by the same forested area that existed 100 years ago. **The U.S. is the world's largest consumer of forest products**, jumping 50% in the past 40 years.

- **Fisheries and Aquatic Resources:** Thirty percent of assessed fish populations in U.S. coastal waters are either overfished or fished unsustainably. **A third of all U.S. lakes, a quarter of rivers, all of the Great Lakes, and two thirds of the nation's coastline were under a fish consumption advisory from pollutants in 2004**, many related to mercury contamination. About a third of America's freshwater animal species are at risk.
- **Agriculture:** Nearly **3,000 acres of U.S. farmland are lost every day to development**, with the rate of loss increasing. America's prime farmland was developed 30% faster than other rural land in the past two decades.
- **Energy:** With only 5% of the global population, the U.S. consumes almost 25% of the world's energy. America has the highest oil consumption worldwide, and is projected to use 43% more oil than current levels by 2025. **Transportation is the nation's fastest growing energy use sector.**
- **Climate change:** The U.S. is the single largest carbon dioxide (CO₂) greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter in the world, accounting for nearly a quarter of all global emissions. These are predicted to increase by nearly 43% by 2020. **The nation's average temperature increase over the next 100 years is projected to be 5-9°F. Predictions of sea level rise and more severe weather events that will impact coastal areas are predicted, particularly in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.**
- **Waste:** Each American produces about **5 pounds of trash daily, up from less than 3 in 1960, five times the average amount in developing countries.** Nearly half of the nation's 1,300 "Superfund" sites are linked to contaminated or threatened drinking water sources. The U.S. is the largest per capita municipal waste producer in the world.

Sources: The "*U.S. National Report on Population and the Environment*" compiles most recent available science-based data from a wide range of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Reference Bureau, U.S. EPA, and leading scientists and academic institutions. For complete list of sources please see the report endnotes.

The Center for Environment and Population (CEP) is an independent non-profit research and policy organization that addresses the relationship between human population, resource consumption, and the environment. The Center works to strengthen the scientific basis of policies and public outreach to achieve a long-term sustainable balance between people and the natural environment.

CEP partners with leading organizations to link science to policy and public education, to better understand and effectively address the issues. To do this, the Center and its partners undertake a series of activities to: compile and assess the current knowledge and emerging trends on the issues; produce expert and research-based materials for policy makers, the media and the public, and; undertake activities to integrate the materials and information directly into policies and public outreach.

*The Center has two major program areas: "**Emerging Issues in Environment and Population**", and "**Building New Population-Environment Leadership**". CEP produces balanced, easy-to-understand science-based materials including the **U.S. State Reports on Population and the Environment** and the **Issues on Population & the Environment** series, the **U.S. National Report on Population and the Environment** (with fact sheets and briefing materials), and the award-winning **AAAS Atlas of Population and Environment**. All are available in hard copy or online at www.cepnet.org.*

The Center also organizes directly linked follow-up activities to integrate the cutting-edge information and materials into policies and public outreach. CEP focuses on the U.S. population's environmental impact (from the local community to national level), and the nation's role within the global context. The Center for Environment and Population (CEP) utilizes its CEP Experts Network to engage leading scientists and other experts in their programs. CEP is a project of the Tides Center, and works in the U.S. at the local-national level and internationally.

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