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   (10) FALSE RE\*\*\*URANCE: ELIMINATION OF 'CARBON FOOTPRINT'  
     
   Peter Salonius [ - ]  
     
   Benny,  
     
   You posted Wendell Krossa's piece en\*\*\*led 'RESPONSE TO LOMBERG AND  
   MONCKTON' (CCNet, 20 April 09) in which he wtote:  
     
   "So if there is no human fingerprint, then oops, there goes over half  
   the human footprint. It seems humanity has been treading more lightly  
   on the planet than we have been led to believe. And if co2science and  
   many other excellent sources are right on the benefits of carbon/CO2  
   (and I believe they are), then there is no need for us to reduce our  
   carbon footprint ..."  
     
   The human footprint reduction that has been called for by Rees,  
   Wackernagel and others has to do with many other excess demands on the  
   global ecosystem besides our carbon containing gas emissions. I have  
   posited in an essay on THEOILDRUM (see below) that the overshoot of  
   carrying capacity began as soon as humans began cultivation  
   agriculture because of its \*\*\*ociated soil damage. Rees has agreed  
   that the overshoot of carrying capacity ocurred long before the 20th  
   century, but he suggests that he did not want to frighten people with  
   the enormity of our excesses.  
     
   The recently published book 'Sustainability or Collapse: An Integrated  
   History and Future of People on Earth', edited by Robert Costanza and  
   several others, deals with the history of past empires and  
   civilizations as they collapsed because of mounting population  
   pressure on such resources as water supplies and soil productive  
   capacity.  
     
   "Neither Malthus nor the "new Malthusians" could have foreseen what  
   the subs\*\*\*ution of temporary supplies of non renewable geological  
   energy (fossil and nuclear) for sunlight energy, starting in the mid  
   1800s, would do to non sustainably raise agricultural productivity by:  
     
   1. freeing up land formerly used to feed draft animals (horses, oxen  
   etc.) for the production of food for humans,  
     
   2. facilitating the mining, long distance transport and manufacture  
   (ammonia by the Haber-Bosch process from natural gas) of fertilizers  
   to replace those soil nutrients lost by cultivation agriculture,  
     
   3. allowing the temporarily increased agricultural productivity that  
   resulted from the development of new crop varieties produced by the  
   Green Revolution - that are dependent on irrigation from depleting  
   fossil water supplies, heavy use of fertilizers, and pesticides - all  
   of which are dependent on fossil fuel resources that are now becoming  
   rapidly depleted."  
     
   I have maintained, in a 'somewhat well referenced article' posted on  
   THE OILDRUM, October 20, 2008, that economic and population growth,  
   facilitated by the shift from hunter gathering to farming, have been  
   responsible for the environmental destruction that has been escalating  
   for the last 10,000 years. I think you will agree that IF my thesis,  
   which is the culmination of my ~ 42 year investigation into the  
   relationship between humans and their supporting ecosystems, is  
   correct -- then the 'population bomb'/that continues to make natural  
   resource management problematic/exploded a long, long time ago, see:  
   'Agriculture: Unsustainable Resource Depletion Began 10,000 Years Ago'  
   - at

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My 'guesstimate' for sustainable human numbers in the 100s of  
millions, if true, suggests that the present global population has so  
far overshot the carrying capacity of its supporting ecosystems that  
most analyses of the relationship of excessive human numbers to  
SPECIFIC ASPECTS of environmental damage are simply indulgent academic  
exercises.  
  
There are more people on the planet (and have been for millennia) than  
it can sustainably support.  
  
Many of us have concluded that even TWO CHILD FAMILIES -- that would  
only slowly stabilize the human population -- are not an adequate  
response to this problem; we require the adoption of NO or ONE CHILD  
PER FAMILY behaviour to orchestrate the Rapid Population DECLINE that  
is necessary now.  
  
Peter Salonius  
Research Scientist  
Natural Resources Canada

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(11) RESPONSE TO PETER SALONIUS: THERE IS NO REASON FOR ALARMISM  
  
Wendell Krossa [ - ]  
  
Peter,  
  
Just some comments in relation to your response. Yes, the ecological  
footprint model (EF) has to do with other demands but carbon/CO2 is  
the main element by far (referred to as energy demands by Rees). In  
Canada fully 58% of the EF estimate is allocated to energy (carbon  
sink) and this is typical of the developed world estimates (see Eco-  
Footprint Analysis: Tracking (Un)Sustainability by Bill Rees

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Your comments, "the overshoot of carrying capacity began as soon as  
humans began cultivation agriculture....(and) environmental  
destruction that has been escalating for the last 10,000 years",  
express something of the ideological themes that underpin this EF  
model and the sustainability thinking related to it. Yes, there is  
some science present in the mix of EF thinking but this is often  
overwhelmed by the ideological thrust of modern environmentalism that  
also colors EF analysis.  
  
I was a student at a UBC grad program in the early 90s when Bill Rees  
and Mathis Wackernagel (one of his PhD students) were constructing  
this EF model at the School of Community and Regional Planning where  
Rees was Director. Bill often presented tidbits of his ideological  
leanings in cl\*\*\*room discussions. This past year (2008) I had an  
extensive discussion with Bill re his model.  
  
My concerns with the model have to do with Rees's contention (as with  
yours) that the human enterprise is degrading/destroying the  
environment. As evidence of this degradation, Bill refers repeatedly  
to a litany of disasters which he claims show how humanity is  
destroying nature and the natural resource base on which all life  
depends. His list is as follows (see above article by Rees and here  
are some of my responses to his litany):  
Climate change- Which climate change? The present cooling period which  
once again calls into question the CO2/warming relationship and the  
anthropogenic influence on climate?  
  
Ozone depletion- Other scientists (see James Marusek's The Origin of  
the Ozone Hole- Natural or Anthropological at galaxyinternet.net )  
argue that the ozone layer increases and decreases naturally and is  
unrelated to human activity.  
  
Sea level rise: What sea level rise? A similar rate of sea level rise  
has been occurring since the end of the last glaciation some 10,000  
years ago (about 120 meters of total rise since then).  
  
Deforestation: What deforestation? Over the past six decades Earth's  
forest cover has remained fairly stable at about 30% of land area (see  
FAO Yearbooks for the best and only source of credible data). In fact,  
there was actually an increase in forest cover between 1949-94 from  
some 40 million square kilometers to some 43 million square kilometers  
and this during the time that we were told publicly that Earth's  
forests were disappearing.  
Fish stock collapses- a favorite element in Rees' litany. But you  
cannot extrapolate a few isolated incidents out to generalize the  
situation of the entire world fishery. FAO data on fisheries is quite  
hopeful. Overall ocean catch is decreasing and farmed fish production  
is increasing.  
  
And then species extinctions- I have pointed out to Bill that his  
figures (17,000 extinctions per year in one article) are grossly  
exaggerated. The famous 1992 IUCN study on extinctions (summarized by  
Julian Simon in Scarcity or Abundance) revealed absolutely no evidence  
of any extinctions above historical rates of 1-2 per year. It also  
challenged environmentalist's \*\*\*umptions behind species loss (a rate  
of loss related to loss of primary forest cover that did not recognize  
such things as species adaptability to secondary habitat). And what  
about the periods of glaciation that have m\*\*\*ively changed the  
surface of the Earth over the past 2 million years, much more than  
humans have ever impacted nature. Species have adapted and remained  
fairly stable (numbers of species) over this period by moving north  
and south over continents and up and down mountain slopes.  
  
And further on the forest resource- remember that since 1949 the human  
population has gone from 2.5 billion to over 6 billion and GDP  
(consumption) has increased immensely over the same time period yet  
forest cover has remained stable (actually increased) over this time.  
According to EF predictions we should have exhausted forest resources.  
But we didn't because we are learning to use resources more  
efficiently and sustainably.  
  
I believe it was the World Resources Ins\*\*\*ute that, despite their  
typical alarmism regarding forests, noted that there were only two  
current areas ("hotspots") of forest devastation- one in Central  
Africa and another in a state in Brazil.  
  
So are we really devastating nature? What does the evidence show? Here  
we confront the ideology that drives much contemporary  
environmentalism. Is humanity destroying nature or changing elements  
of it to new uses such as agriculture. Is this really degradation or  
just change, and beneficial change? What are the values, beliefs, and  
science that apply here?  
  
Wilfred Beckerman (Green Colored Gl\*\*\*es) discusses some of the  
differing values that are applied in regard to nature. And which  
values should take preeminence and to what extent? Some people  
(personal aesthetics) want a world covered in wilderness. To them any  
human engagement of nature is destruction and devastation. To others,  
human engagement of nature and changing wilderness to other uses is  
simply progress.  
  
So many issues arise here. The value of humanity in relation to other  
species. Are we just another species deserving of no special rights to  
natural resources than any other species? Alston Chase (In A Dark  
Wood) traces the various ideas that contribute to modern environmental  
ideology, including the synthesis of American nature religion with  
German metaphysics: the holism that views individuals as only parts of  
a larger system with no independent standing. He also notes the  
environmental antipathy to values of humanism, anti-capitalism, anti-  
materialism, anti-private property, anti-technology, anti-consumerism,  
anti-urban living, nature worship, a belief in the superiority of  
primitive culture, a desire to return to the land, faith in organic  
farming, and a program to create nature reserves (this list is from  
his book In a Dark Wood, p.129). J. E. de Steiguer has also traced  
various contributing sources of ideas in The Origins of Modern  
Environmental Thought.  
  
My point is that we need to challenge this idea of the primacy of  
nature (wilderness) over all other considerations. Personal aesthetics  
play a big role here.  
  
And is nature inherently wise (GAIA, Mother Nature) and humanity  
corrupt and destructive? Or, as Julian Simon and Greg Easterbrook  
argue (The Ultimate Resource and A Moment on the Earth), does humanity  
bring a much needed intelligence to a natural world that has too long  
been shaped by random, dumb, and blind forces that have led to many  
dead ends and too much destructiveness (untamed natural forces that  
produce disasters, diseases, parasites, toxins, m\*\*\*ive species  
extinctions, predatory violence and all the rest that make nature so  
dark and threatening).  
  
So is humanity really a blot on nature, a cancer, or are we the  
creative intelligence that can rescue nature and improve on it? Simon  
argues that history shows that humanity has been more of a creative  
force for good than a destructive force.  
  
Others have argued that humanity is as natural as any other part of  
nature and what we do is as natural as any other activity in nature  
(whether bees building hives, ants building anthills, or beavers  
building dams).  
  
This is not to argue for thoughtless elimination of wilderness. No.  
Most of us value some wilderness for recreational and other purposes.  
And our track record shows that we are protecting vast areas of  
wilderness. The argument here seems to pivot around how much should be  
preserved. Bill Rees argues that we need lots to support our  
civilization and also it is the right of other species to have their  
natural habitat. Interesting here is the fact that many species seem  
to prefer more civilized habitat to natural wilderness. Some studies  
have shown that more species of birds inhabit German cities than wild  
areas. And as the novel Pan's Labyrinth notes, animals may even prefer  
such situations as zoos where they are protected from predation,  
disease, climate extremes, and other discomforts of wilderness. Nature  
as it is without human engagement can be quite dark and nasty (I refer  
to Lyall Watson's Dark Nature).  
  
The EF model raises all sorts of issues. Such as the subs\*\*\*ution of  
depleting resources for alternatives. Human history has proven that we  
make adjustments well to resource issues. Huber and Mills in  
Bottomless Well show how humans have found new resources or created  
new ones when others were being depleted (fiber optics to replace  
copper). Rees rejects the response of subs\*\*\*ution.  
  
Rees also rejects the Kuznet's curve response. Indur Goklany has  
offered a new version of this curve (The Improving State of the World)  
which shows that when people gain enough wealth and their basic needs  
are met, they naturally turn to improving their environments. This is  
high value to most people.  
  
The EF model is not built on rational and objective science but  
incorporates much of the ideology of its founder Rees. He is  
stubbornly pessimistic in his evaluation of life and the human  
enterprise. It appears that he has trained himself to scour the world  
looking only for evidence of decline, decay, and disaster (the Second  
Law of Thermodynamics figures largely in his thinking). In cl\*\*\*room  
discussions he revealed something of his anti-capitalist, anti-urban,  
anti-growth and development, and generally anti-human enterprise  
leanings.  
  
The EF model is not helpful in understanding the real state of the  
planet and nature. Simon, Lomberg, Goklany, Huber, Beckerman, and  
others provide a more accurate and helpful picture of the world and  
the human influence on the world. While problems still exist in  
various places, overall we are doing well in managing the planet's  
resources. Our satellites now monitor most aspects of the natural  
world 24/7 and if problems arise we will take action to prevent any  
sort of calamitous outcome.  
  
Our track record gives much reason for optimism. We bring to life the  
priceless gift of creative intelligence and the desire for a better  
future for all. And our problem solving skills have improved  
continually and immensely over history.  
  
Just a further comment on your point 3: "the temporary increase in  
agricultural productivity is dependent on rapidly depleting fossil  
fuel resources" (fertilizers and other inputs). This is the response  
of Bill Rees to the argument that technological improvements (e.g. GM  
crops, fertilizers, and other advances) will resolve resource scarcity  
issues such as food supply. This reply of soon approaching resource  
exhaustion again conforms to Rees' endless search for an apocalyptic  
end time scenario for all resource issues. But it is speculative  
prophecy and not sound evidence.  
  
One could ask in response, what evidence do we have that fossil fuels  
are depleting rapidly (Peak oil theory?). A study by the Colorado  
River Commission (World Fossil Fuel Reserves and Projected Depletion  
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) estimates  
reserves sufficient for almost 100 years. Rees claims in one article  
that we will exhaust fossil fuels by 2012. Based on what evidence?  
  
Others appeal to the human track record with resources and the  
contrary evidence we have that all resources issues have been solved  
by discovery of more of the depleting resource or by subs\*\*\*ution  
(finding or creating alternatives). Look for example at the very  
process mentioned by Peter, the Haber-Bosch process for extracting  
nitrogen from the air. An Israeli scientist is now making further  
improvements on this process. And what about supplies such as potash,  
of which a major new source was only discovered in 1943 in  
Saskatchewan.  
  
The human history of dealing with resource scarcity issues is covered  
well by Julian Simon in Ultimate Resource, Wilfred Beckerman in A  
Poverty of Reason, and Huber and Mills in Bottomless Well and Hard  
Green. They explain the economic and other processes that come into  
operation when some resource scarcity emerges.  
  
It appears that there is no evidence for alarmism in regard to  
resources needed by the human enterprise. Our track record offers much  
hope and no reason to despair. And I recognize that Bill Rees will  
come back with the argument that now in world history is a unique and  
unprecedented time as the human population is larger than ever before  
and people are using so much more resources than ever before. We are  
close to some "tipping point", he claims. Again, this seems more like  
speculative apocalyptic prophecy and not sound science.  
  
The long term trends of history reveal the positive aspects to human  
population growth and development, such as the decreasing rate at  
which we use resources (efficiency gains) and other positive elements.  
Simon is right that our history offers ample reason to celebrate the  
human enterprise and no evidence that our successes will not continue.  
  
Wendell Krossa  
  
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