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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.

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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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