

Forums for a Future¹

Podcast # 32: Carrying Capacity of the Planet

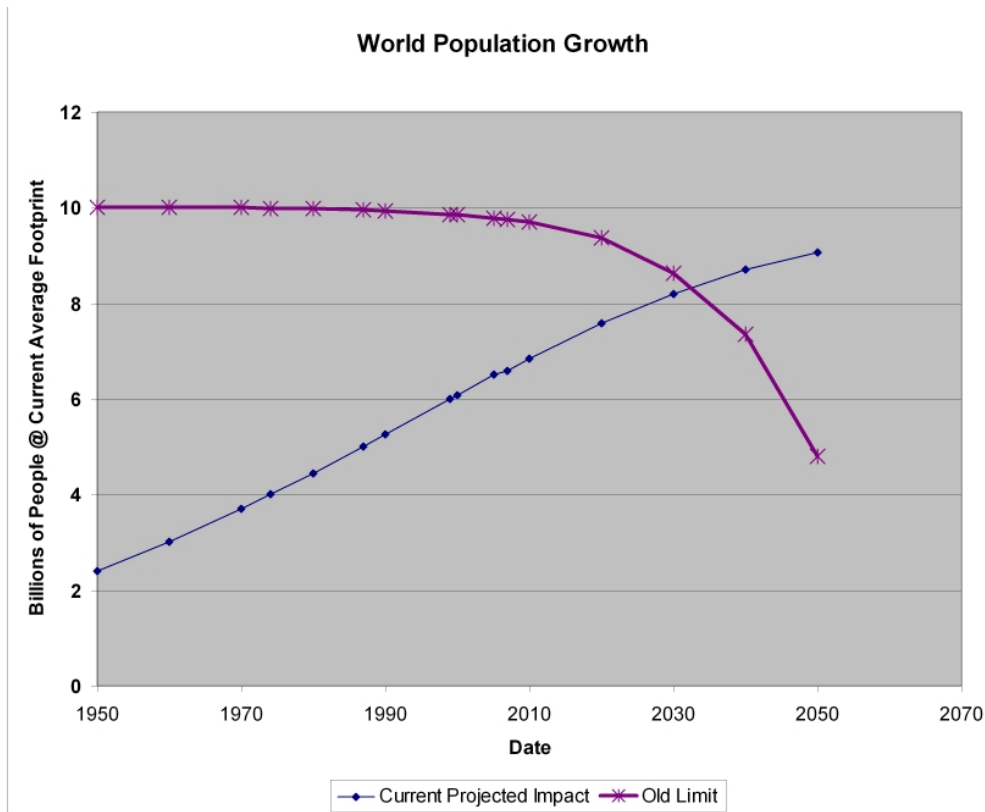
K. Edward Renner, PhD²

12,000 years ago there were 4 million people in the world it took 6000 more years for the population to double. But, with the advent of the modern era people lived longer and the population doubled more quickly.

When I was born there were 2.2 billion people in the world. There are now 6.8 billion, a more than three fold increase within my lifetime.

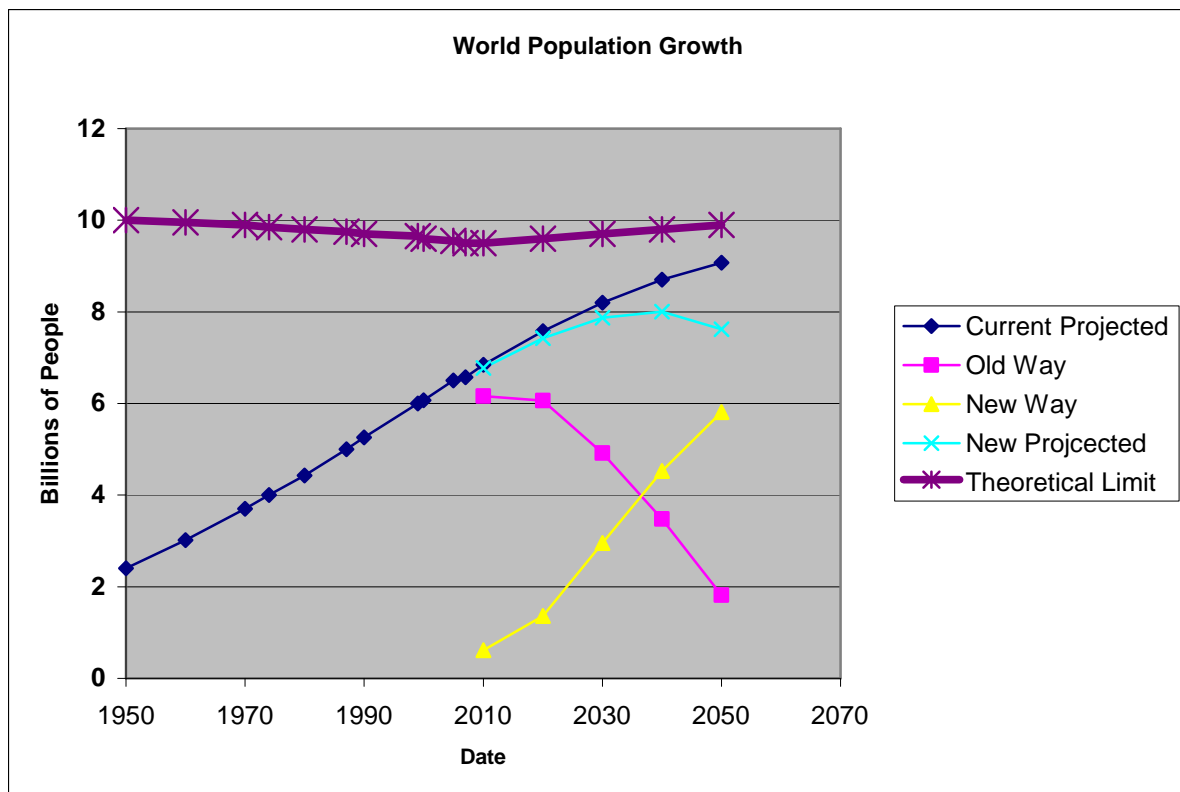
This has created a unique situation in the history of human civilization. The planet can carry about 10 billion people, provided we, humans, consumed the resources on the planet only as fast as they could be replaced or renewed.

However, we are currently depleting these resources faster thus reducing the carrying capacity of the planet. The greater the human impact the faster is the reduction in the carrying capacity of the planet. These two functions like two speeding trains will collide within the lifetime of the millennial generation. Without change, a Mad Max world will be the result. (See attached Figure)



Fortunately, we already have the capacity to achieve a reasonable solution. If by 2010, 10% of the people reduce their foot on the planet by only 1%, and, in each of the next four decades they doubled their effort and induced an additional 20% to join their effort in each of the next three decades, then by the year 2050 80% of the population would have reduce their impact by 16%. (See attached Figure)

This amount of reduction would cap the average human impact on the planet at 8 billion, and would allow the carrying capacity of the planet to start to return to its historical rate of 10 billion based on the current average per person rate of consumption. The millennial challenge is the willingness over the next 41 years to make the economic, political, social and psychological choices necessary to stay safely below the carrying capacity of the planet. No one in human history has ever been here before. But, everyone has a mortal stake in constructing a new World View appropriate for the 21st century.



¹ This essay is based on an audio and video podcast by Professor Renner entitled “**Forums for a Future**”. Text, audio and video copies of the material may be accessed from his website at www.kerenner.com. The direct link for subscribing to the video series from iTunes is:

<http://phobos.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=289289719>

² Professor Renner may be reached at erenner@cas.usf.edu. The podcast series is also available through the University of South Florida at:

https://my.usf.edu/webapps/lobj-podcast-bb_bb60/feed/IDH3400.004S10/podcast.xml