

## Expanding population a threat to nature

**Outdoors: A new book of essays compiled by the Izaak Walton League of America focuses on an issue that so far has received little critical examination.**

**On the Bay: Tom Horton**

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IF I HAD a pot of money for environmental causes, I'd direct a lot of it this year to the Izaak Walton League of America.

The "Ikes," founded in 1922 to defend our hunting, fishing and outdoor heritage, is the only environmental organization gutsy and farsighted enough to tackle the root cause of our affronts to nature.

To that end, the 40,000-member league has just published a must-read collection of essays by nationally recognized outdoor writers, *Population Growth and Outdoor America*.

"What would most sportsmen say are the principal threats to outdoor recreation in the next 50 years?" the introduction asks.

"Sprawl? Loss of habitat? Invasive species? How many people put the pieces together to identify the underlying common threat - our increasing population and never-ending appetite for growth?"

The "appetite" part of the equation - our increasing consumption of natural resources - gets the attention of most environmental and conservation groups.

From the [Chesapeake Bay](#) Foundation to the Sierra Club, they work hard on the absolutely vital business of reducing our polluting behaviors.

But does it also matter how many of us there are? Can we all live so lightly on the earth, on the Chesapeake, that total population doesn't matter?

You would think so from the see-no-evil behaviors of just about everybody but the Izaak Walton League.

I should disclose that I helped write a "how-to" pamphlet the league put out for journalists covering population growth. It's a companion piece to the *Outdoor America* collection mentioned above.

I am so tired of hearing that "the Chesapeake's not much better after 20 years of restoration, but we've kept it from getting worse as millions more people moved here." People say that as if population

growth were a natural force, like the wind or tides, to be accommodated, never questioned.

I know of no comparable environmental issue less critically examined than the "growth is good, growth is inevitable" precept.

So it's heartening to see Idaho writer and big game-hunter Scott Stouder conclude this about the last salmon runs of the Snake River system:

"Can we save salmon by saving our last wild places? First, we do have to protect our last wild rivers and lands.

"But ... how can we save our last wild places if we disconnect and isolate them by continually expanding our efforts to feed, clothe and house a geometrically expanding human population? If we want healthy land, rivers and salmon, we must envision a world with fewer people."

There's also a powerful piece by Minnesota outdoor columnist and author Shawn Perich on the many and varied environmental insults that have diminished trout on Lake Superior's North Shore:

"I wish I could say conservationists just need to roll up their sleeves and work a little harder to stop it. I wish I could blame a single polluter.

"[But] as I write these obituaries for trout streams, it is apparent the continuing press of population is the underlying challenge. I suspect our indifference to dying trout streams has less to do with a disregard for nature than a collective inability to confront the painful truth: We - all of us - are the problem."

So how do we begin anew?

First, by making population growth an issue, which the Ikes have been doing in a common-sense, solution-oriented way since 1970.

The group's companion Guide to Population Issues, aimed at outdoor writers, is worth reading by any citizen who wants to understand this complex and absolutely vital issue. It offers basic concepts of demography, the science of population study. It took earth about a million years to get to 2 billion people - in 1930. We've added 4.4 billion in the last 75 years.

The 38-page guide has a good piece on immigration, the largest source of population growth, which is projected to double U.S. population by 2100, to 570 million. (We could stabilize at 400 million with modest changes in birth rates and a return to historical rates of immigration.)

The guide also links population and environment - humans now use the equivalent of 5.4 acres of earth's natural resources per capita, but earth has only 4.5 acres. No wonder a United Nations report says we're "wearing out" the planet.

Be you outdoor professional or anyone who wonders at the lack of environmental progress, get these excellent publications now. Mail them to your favorite environmental group and ask what they are doing about growth.

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