

# Links Between Population Growth, Reproductive Rights/Care, and Conservation: A Website Scan

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## Introduction

Globally, nature is declining at unprecedented rates<sup>i</sup>. Around 1 million animal and plant species are currently threatened with extinction, and many more will be within the upcoming decades. According to the United Nations, the five main drivers of this decline in nature are: (1) changes in land and sea use; (2) direct exploitation of organisms; (3) climate change; (4) pollution and (5) invasive alien species<sup>i</sup>. Many of these drivers can be connected back to our growing human population directly. With the UN estimating that the human population will grow to be between 9.4 billion and 10.1 billion in 2050, this growing population is placing increased pressure on our natural lands and resources<sup>ii</sup>.

The growth of the human population is correlated with an increase in the extraction of resources from the environment, including fossil fuels, minerals, trees, water, and wildlife<sup>iii</sup>. Many of these resources are non-renewable and their removal significantly harms the survival of plants and animals in the area. Similarly, a growing population requires a growing amount of food to support it. Therefore, the amount of agricultural land, which destroys the natural ecology of the land and removes the habitat for the plants and animals that reside on it, must increase to support our growing population. With more people on the planet, there will also be increased carbon emissions, contributing to the global climate crisis<sup>iii</sup>. It is important to note that there are vast disparities between emissions from high-income countries and low- and middle- income countries, as only 10 percent of the global population generates about half of consumption related emissions<sup>iv</sup>. Therefore, population growth in wealthier countries is likely to increase global carbon emissions more significantly than growth in less wealthy countries.

As of 2014, it is estimated that around 225 million women in developing countries have unmet needs for family planning tools<sup>v</sup>. With about 40% of pregnancies in developing countries being unintended, the promotion of reproductive rights, such as access to voluntary family planning methods, is an important aspect of mitigating population growth<sup>v</sup>. Expanding access to reproductive health services and voluntary family planning methods globally is an important tool to slowing human population growth. For clarity, the topic of population growth and reproductive rights does have a troubling past, but current and future discussions of limiting population growth must be human rights centered, with individuals being given full autonomy over whether, when, and how many children they may have<sup>iv</sup>.

Due to the negative environmental effects of our growing human population, it is important that conservation organizations begin to discuss population and reproductive rights as an environmental issue. The promotion of reproductive rights with the intention of slowing human population growth aligns with conservation efforts. This website scan aims to examine how various conservation organizations currently publicly discuss our growing human population and the intersection with reproductive rights.

## **Center for Biological Diversity Population and Sustainability Overview**

“The Center’s Population and Sustainability program addresses the impacts on wildlife and the environment that are caused by human population pressure and destructive consumption and production. We fight for solutions that advance justice, equity, health, and a compassionate world where both people and wildlife can thrive.

To protect the wild, we use creative media, advocacy and public outreach to raise awareness about human population growth and unsustainable consumption — and their direct connection to the climate and extinction crises.

Our innovative campaigns — like our award-winning Endangered Species Condoms and Take Extinction Off Your Plate projects — build toward a just and sustainable future, including the empowerment of women and girls, universal access to reproductive healthcare and education, a healthy and secure food system, a less extractive economic system, and a commitment to protecting wildlife and wild places.”

[About Our Population and Sustainability Work](#)

### **Organizational Scan Methodology**

Organizations were chosen by utilizing two lists that had a focus on conservation. The first list was generated prior to this project and consisted of conservation groups that focused on endangered species that are featured in the Endangered Species Condom project. The second list was also generated prior to this project during a previous organization scan.

Each organization was examined individually. Each scan began by reviewing multiple standard website pages, if present on the website: home, about us, and the mission and values. Then, the search function on the website was utilized to find any mentions of various keywords. These keywords included: human population, world population, overpopulation, reproductive rights, abortion, birth control, and family planning. For each search of a keyword, the first page of search results was reviewed for any relevant findings. Any findings that related to the harms of human population growth on wildlife, reproductive care/rights, or the link between human population growth and reproductive care/rights were noted. For organizations that did not have a search feature on their website, the remaining website pages that were not included in the initial review were reviewed for terms of interest.

## Overview of Findings

	Number of Organizations Scanned	Website Mentions the Effect of Population Growth on Wildlife	Website Mentions a Positive Link Between Addressing Population Growth and Reproductive Rights/Care
Conservation Non-Profits	50	26	6

*Note. Blog posts from individual authors that do not officially state that they are the opinion of the organization were not included. Only information found on the official pages of the website or endorsed by the organization were included.*

## Summary of Website Scan

Only 6 of the 50 conservation organizations examined had mentions of the connection between the growing human population and reproductive care/rights on their websites. Overall, organizations were more likely to mention the link between population growth and the harm to wildlife, with 26 of the 50 organizations including a mention on their websites. With only 7 organizations having some type of mention of reproductive rights/care, this topic was also found to not be discussed commonly amongst the organizations scanned.

Of the 6 organizations that had mentions of the connection between our growing human population and reproductive rights/care, 4 of the organizations discussed these topics in an international context. Only 2 of the 6 organizations included discussions of these topics in the United States specifically. It is also important to note that all but 1 of these organizations had a multi-species conservation focus. The only conservation organization that has a one species focus to mention a link between these topics was the International Crane Foundation. Similarly, the majority of these 6 organizations were very large nonprofit organizations.

Of the 26 organizations that had mentions of the effect of population growth on wildlife, 21 organizations discussed population growth in the context of habitat loss. 3 of the 26 organizations discussed the impact of the growing population on the food and agricultural industry. Another 3 of the 26 organizations had mentions of the harms of increasing consumption by an increasing population. Only 2 of the 26 organizations discussed these topics in the context of mitigating climate change. This group of 26 organizations was also more likely to have variety in organization scale and size. In terms of scale, there were some organizations that focused on specific regions, such as a specific watershed or state, and some organizations that had a more general and international focus. The organizations in this category also varied in whether they focused on general, multi-species conservation efforts or a specific species conservation. Similarly, in terms of organization size, the 26 organizations ranged from

extremely large conservation groups, such as the World Wildlife Fund, to smaller organizations, such as Trout Unlimited.

The full organizational scan can be accessed [here](#).

### Conclusion

The results of the website scan highlights the lack of discussion about the growing population and reproductive rights/care amongst conservation organizations. With only 6 conservation organizations out of the 50 scanned discussing the positive link between addressing population growth and reproductive rights/care, there is significant space for more conservation organizations to begin addressing these topics. As previously identified, the growing human population will have detrimental environmental impacts, which includes loss of biodiversity globally. Without conservation organizations working towards mitigating human population growth, they will experience additional hurdles to the conservation work they do. The next step of the website scan is to reach out to these conservation organizations in order to determine the reasons why they do/do not address these topics. These reasons can then be used to better target outreach efforts to other conservation organizations to encourage increased discussion about conservation, population, and reproductive rights/care.

### Mentions of the Positive Link Between Addressing Population Growth and Reproductive Rights/Care

Organization	Mentions of the Positive Link Between Addressing Population Growth and Reproductive Rights/Care
Friends of the Earth	<p>"The real answer to the climate change crisis lies in changing the way we manage, extract, use and distribute Earth's natural resources. We need a new model of environmental, social, racial, economic and gender justice that upends traditional power structures in order to build a future where everyone has access to wealth, equitable decision-making and safety." <a href="#">A Green New Deal to Save People and the Planet</a>, 2019</p> <p>"Overturning Roe and abolishing an essential reproductive right is unconscionable and wrong. Americans will forever remember this unjust ruling reversing 50 years of progress for basic human rights.</p> <p>Congress must end the filibuster and immediately pass legislation that guarantees the right to an abortion for all who live in this country. We call on Friends of the Earth's members and supporters across the nation to demonstrate and defend a person's right to choose." <a href="#">Friends of the Earth Condemns Roe Reversal from U.S. Supreme Court</a>, June 2022</p>

<p>The Nature Conservancy</p>	<p>“Women and girls who are educated have more control to actively manage their reproductive health, realize higher wages and experience greater upward mobility, leading to overall economic growth. Educated women and girls can then be more effective stewards of their land and water, and gain greater capacity to adapt to shocks of natural disasters and extreme weather events driven by climate change.”</p> <p><a href="#">Wanna Save the Planet? Empower Women</a>, March 2018</p>
<p>World Wildlife Fund</p>	<p>“Finally, where there is unmet family planning need, WWF takes an approach referred to as Population, Health and the Environment (PHE). Working through synergistic links between human and ecosystem health, integrated projects such as PHE, improve human well-being, help encourage sustainable use of natural resources, and promote sustained delivery of ecosystem services in the medium to long term. This, in turn, can improve community livelihoods for people today and in the future.”</p> <p><a href="#">Women and Girls</a>, n.d. (Most recent publication related to PHE projects March, 2022)</p>
<p>International Crane Foundation</p>	<p>“This World Population Day, we are proud to announce the start of a <u>new project</u> focused on improving human and environmental health, by ensuring that healthy wetlands are available to the people and the Endangered Grey Crowned Cranes of Uganda’s Rukiga District. The Endangered Wildlife Trust, the International Crane Foundation, the Margaret Pyke Trust and Rugarama Hospital are working with local stakeholders to provide the sustainable alternative livelihoods and family planning information and services that local women and men have lobbied for. By combining this work with wetland restoration and other conservation actions, we can encourage long-term health for both the wetlands and the people that rely on them for their water, food and livelihoods.”</p> <p><a href="#">New project announcement for south western Uganda</a>, July 2020</p>
<p>IUCN</p>	<p>“The Thriving Together campaign highlights that successful biodiversity conservation requires taking people, our health, and our interactions with the natural world into account. Increasing human pressures are among the many challenges facing planetary health, and by harming ecosystems, people undermine food and water security and human health, and threaten habitats and species. Ensuring family planning is available to all who seek it is among the positive actions organizations must take to lessen these pressures.”</p> <p><a href="#">Family Planning: critically important for women, girls, the environment &amp; sustainability</a>, July 2019</p>
<p>Women for Conservation</p>	<p>“We facilitate with women’s groups in key communities access to reproductive methods for family planning. In doing so, we seek to empower women and young women, increasing their future opportunities, while alleviating poverty and protecting natural resources. One of the greatest threats to biodiversity is the burgeoning human population, which places excessive demands on natural resources, which our earth is unable to sustain.</p>

	<p>During the past century alone, the human population suddenly soared – more than 7.5 billion people currently inhabit the planet. In striking contrast there were fewer than one billion people for 10,000+ years prior to the 1800s. This extraordinary growth, paired with modern tendencies for over consumption, has placed the future of our planet at great peril. Fortunately, improving access to contraceptives can curb unsustainable population growth.</p> <p>A key solution to this dilemma is empowering women with greater access to voluntary family planning, which is crucial to both conservation and the overall well-being of society. Public health studies have revealed that when communities are given access to birth control and contraceptives, children are better nourished and educated, mothers are healthier, and family wealth increases.</p> <p>Despite these important benefits, many women in many rural communities around the world lack access to these vital resources. an essential initiative of women for conservation is to provide these communities with basic healthcare services, including access to family planning methods and information.”</p> <p><a href="#">What We Do</a>, n.d.</p>
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*Note. One conservation organization, the Sierra Club, was found to discuss both population pressure and reproductive rights/care but not within the framework of a positive link between addressing the two issues. Their statement on population, reproductive care, and conservation can be found below.*

*“The Sierra Club is a pro-choice organization that endorses comprehensive, voluntary reproductive health care for all. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are inalienable human rights that should be guaranteed for all people with no ulterior motive.*

*The Sierra Club focuses on unsustainable, excessive, and inequitable use of resources associated with Western consumption as the primary drivers of environmental and climate degradation. Calls to reduce stress on Earth’s resources must be to stop destructive consumption and to create environmentally responsible societies, not to slow global population growth.*

*The Sierra Club rejects any and all reproductive policies, programs, and activities that promote or condone coercion or targets to reduce population. This includes policies and positions made in the name of preventing “overpopulation” by ideas and means that include, but are not limited to: zero-growth, population stabilization, family planning as climate mitigation, or promoting women’s empowerment or girls’ education as an indirect means to limit population growth.”*

[Population Policy](#), May 2022

## References

<sup>i</sup> United Nations. 2019. UN Report: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2019. World Population Prospects 2019 Highlights. [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019\\_Highlights.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> University of California Museum of Paleontology. Population Growth. <https://ugc.berkeley.edu/background-content/population-growth/>

<sup>iv</sup> Project Drawdown. 2020. Sector Summary - Health and Education. <https://drawdown.org/sectors/Health-and-education>

<sup>v</sup> Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health. 2015. By Slowing Population Growth, Family Planning Can Help Address Food Insecurity and Climate Change. [https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population\\_and\\_sustainability/pdfs/UCSF\\_Population\\_Climate\\_Food\\_Feb\\_3\\_2015.pdf](https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/pdfs/UCSF_Population_Climate_Food_Feb_3_2015.pdf)