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## Dominant Socioeconomic Forces Shaping the Future of the United States

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This chapter is devoted to providing up-to-date summaries of a number of highly important social and economic trends that will play a role in the future of the United States and its natural resources. The topics covered include population growth, changing composition of the population, urban growth and sprawl, transition of rural lands, economic growth, consumer spending, and recreation demands. It is undertaken in part to meet data and information needs associated with the 2005 Update of the Renewable Resources Planning Act Assessment of Forest and Range Lands (RPA). More special is that it is also undertaken to celebrate the 2004 International Symposium on Society and Resource Management (ISSRM).

### Population Trends

There are three fundamental indicators that determine trends in human population: birth rate, death rate and net migration. The difference between birth and death rates is natural population growth (of a resident population). Net migration to and from a country, added to (or subtracted from) its natural growth is total population growth (or, rarely, decline). Following are current statistics and projections of the population to 2100.

#### Natural Growth

At the beginning of the 1800s, birth rates were much higher than now, being around 55 births per every 1,000 population per year. By the early 1900s, birth rates had fallen to around 30 per 1000. At the time of the 2000 Census, the birth rate per 1000 was approximately 14.5. The death rate per 1000 population in 1900 was just over 17, with a spike around 1918 and 1919, due in part to casualties during the First World War. Since then, the death rate has fallen to under 10 per 1000, reaching 8.7 by the 2000 Census. The net difference between birth and death rates was approximately 5.8 per 1000

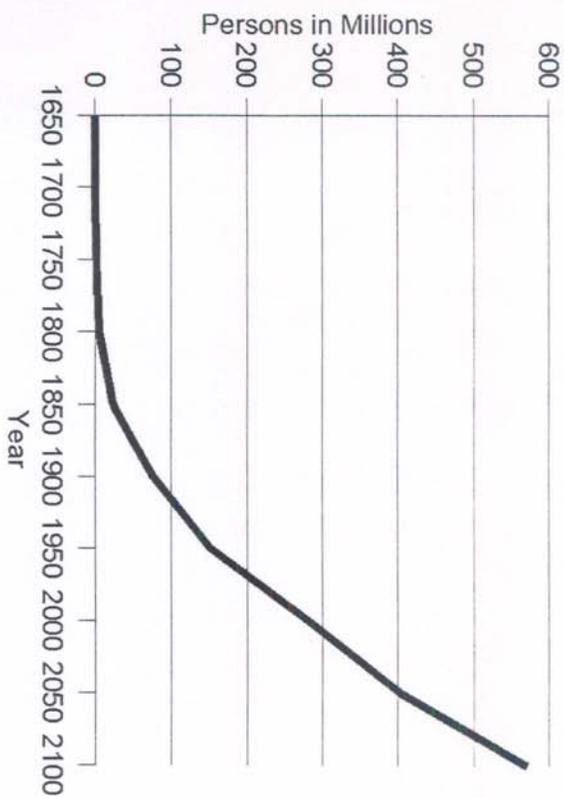


Figure 1. Historical and projected population in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000a, 2002b).

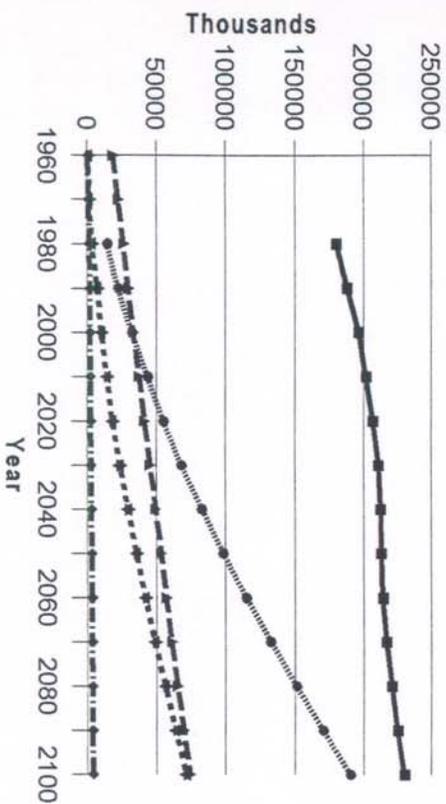


Figure 2. Historic and projected population by race or ethnicity from 1960-2100 (Gibson & Jung 2002; U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000c).

residents per year, or a natural growth estimated at 1.63 million for the year 2000 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2002).

#### Longevity

A very significant factor in overall birth and death rates is life expectancy, or longevity. In 1900, the average life span expected for persons born that year was 46.4 years for males and almost 49 years for females. By 1950, life expectancy for males born that year was up to 65.6 years, and for females, to 71.1 years. In 2000, average life spans predicted was 73.7 for males and 79.4 for females. Bell and Miller (2003) predict an average life span of almost 83 years for males and 87 years for females born in 2100.

#### Net Migration

Each year hundreds of thousands of persons move to or from the United States. The net result has historically been to add population as more people move in than out (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000a). In 1995, net migration to the U.S. was estimated at approximately +856,000. By 2000, net migration was up to +970,000 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000b). The Census Bureau predicts net migration will remain at about the level it was in 2000 through the year 2100, an average net growth of around +935,000 per year. At this rate, over the 100-year period from 2000 to 2100, a net of 93.5 million more people would be added to the U.S. population. Applying the prevailing birth and death rates to this added population would result in an approximate 36 percent growth from immigration alone during the 100 years between 2000 and 2100.

#### Population Growth

As of April 1, 1990 the country's population was just under 249 million. Based on birth rates, death rates and immigration, the Bureau of Census projected that population would grow to 274.6 million by 2000 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000b). However, the recent 2000 Census indicated those early projections were low. Population had grown to more than 281 million by 2000, a growth rate of 13.1 percent since 1990. Figure 1 indicates an expected total population by 2025 of around 337 million, around 403 million by 2050 and almost 570 million by 2100. Thus, a doubling of the population is projected in the United States in just 100 years.

#### Changing Composition of the Population

##### Race and Ethnicity

In 1900, 87.9 percent of the U.S. population was White, mostly non-Hispanic. Blacks (also mostly non-Hispanic) composed 11.6 percent of the population. The remaining half percent was mostly either American Indian or Asian Pacific Islander. By 1950, Whites composed almost 89.5 percent of the population and Blacks 10 percent. Very few then were of other races or ethnicity. By 1980, however, this had begun to change: Whites composed 83.1 percent, Blacks 11.7 percent and others the remaining 5.1 percent (see Figure 2). By 2000, non-Hispanic Whites were just 69.1 percent, a dramatically smaller proportion than in earlier decades. Hispanics were 12.5 percent,

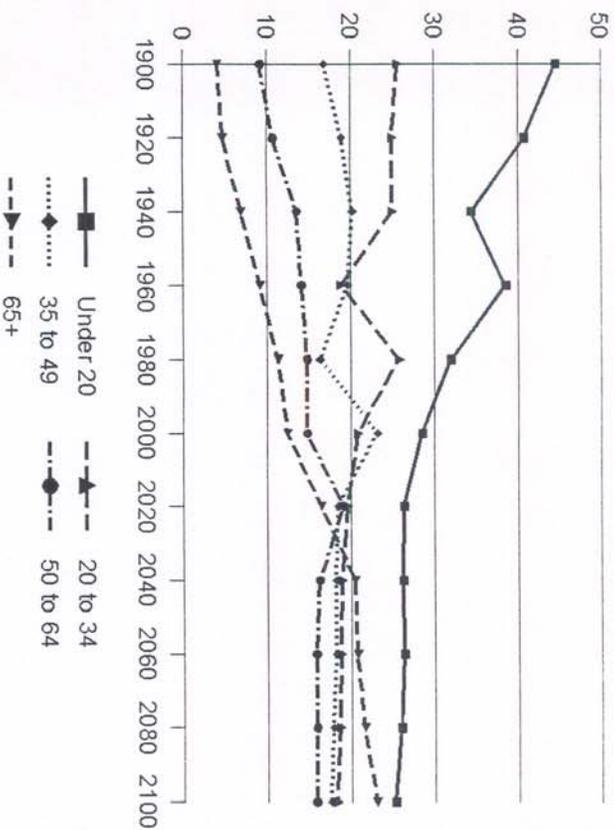


Figure 3. History and projected percent of population by age for the U.S., 1900-2100 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000a).

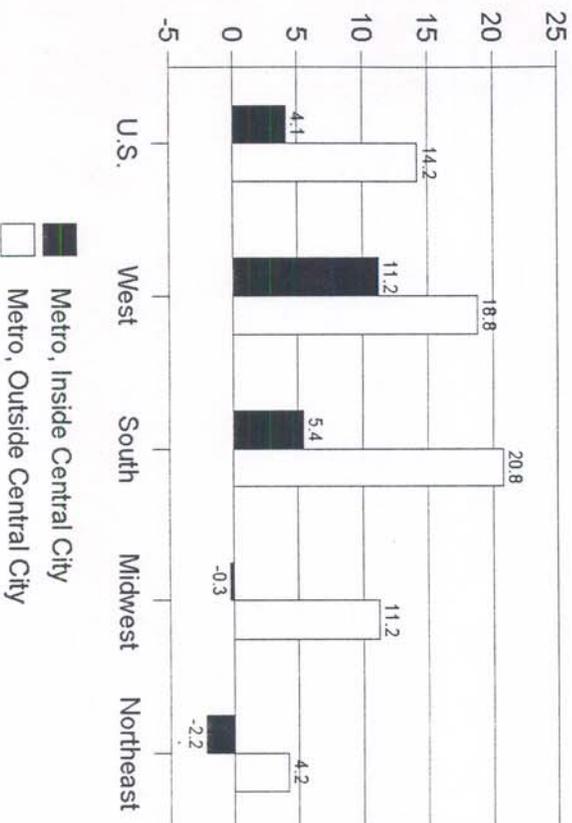


Figure 4. Percentage change in metropolitan population inside and outside of central cities: 1990-99 (Mackun & Wilson, 2000).

and for the first time in U.S. history, exceeded the percentage who were Black. Asians were 3.6 percent, while American Indians were just 0.7 percent in 2000.

#### Age

In 1900 Census estimates showed nearly 45 percent of the population was younger than 20 years of age (see Figure 3). Persons 20 to 34 made up almost 26 percent of the total population. Persons 65 or over were relatively few, under 5 percent. Over time, however, the distribution of the population among age groups has shifted dramatically. By 2000, less than 30 percent was younger than 20, over 44 percent was 20 to 49, and more than 12 percent was 65 or older. As we progress through the 21st Century, the proportion under 20 will likely continue to drop to around 27 percent by 2100, while the percentage 65 or older will rise to about 23 percent in that year. These two age groups will make up about 50 percent of the population by 2100.

#### Suburban Expansion

The post World War-II home building boom ushered in the Age of the Suburbs, an age that continues today and contributes to what is referred to as *sprawl*. Figure 4, which shows metropolitan population growth during the 1990s inside and outside of central cities, typifies the long-term trend of people moving out of the central city to the outlying suburbs. During the 1990s, over 80 percent of all new homes were built in the suburbs. As people have moved out of the urban core, so have commercial development and jobs. Massive suburban shopping malls, "big box" discount retail superstores, and franchise restaurants have produced long-term shifts in shopping patterns from downtown central business districts to suburban retail centers. The shift of people and their expenditures to the suburbs has caused the demise of many downtown areas across the U.S. In many metropolitan areas today, 85 to 90 percent of all jobs are in the suburbs, rather than in central cities (Hirschhorn, 2000).

Another dimension of urban sprawl is the increasing per capita development footprint needed to satisfy modern concepts of suburban lifestyles. This means more acres per person for residential, retail, school, road, recreational facility and other development. Data from the National Resources Inventory (NRI) indicate that in the U.S. since 1960, the rate of conversion of rural land to urban and other built-up uses has exceeded the rate of population growth, a trend that generally holds for all the major regions of the nation (Hirschhorn, 2000). Now, compared with former development patterns, home and lot sizes tend to be larger, and they are larger in the suburbs than in the city. This trend toward lower housing density is a hallmark of contemporary urban sprawl.

#### Rural Impacts of Sprawl and Other Land Use Conversions

The lower 48 states include a total of over 1.9 billion acres of land and water. The majority of this area, 74 percent (almost 1.4 billion acres) is non-federal rural land. These non-federal rural lands include rangeland, forest land, cropland, pastureland and other miscellaneous categories (USDA, 1997). Cropland and pasture together comprise 25.1 percent of non-federal rural area, while developed land is 5.5 percent. Non-federal natural lands, forest and range, are about equal in total area, at 20.9

Year	Cropland	CRP Land	Pasture-Land	Rangeland	Forest Land	Other Rural Land	Developed Land	Water Arcs
1982	420.4 ± 2.0	0 *	131.4 ± 1.3	414.5 ± 4.3	402.6 ± 2.3	48.3 ± 1.3	72.8 ± 0.7	48.6
1987	406.2 ± 2.0	13.8	127.2 ± 1.2	409.3 ± 4.3	404.4 ± 2.3	48.6 ± 1.3	79.0 ± 0.8	49.8
1992	381.6 ± 2.0	34.0	125.4 ± 1.2	405.9 ± 4.3	403.6 ± 2.3	49.8 ± 1.3	86.5 ± 0.8	49.4
1997	376.4 ± 2.0	32.7	119.5 ± 1.2	404.9 ± 4.3	404.7 ± 2.3	50.3 ± 1.3	97.6 ± 0.9	49.9
2001	369.6 ± 2.3	31.8	116.9 ± 1.7	404.7 ± 4.4	404.9 ± 2.5	51.4 ± 1.5	106.3 ± 1.1	50.3

Source: National Resources Inventory, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington DC.

**Table 1. Total surface area by land use/land cover and year in millions of acres, with margins of error**

percent each. Federal land makes up almost 21 percent of the total area of the 48 lower states; water areas are about 2.6 percent.

*Conversion of Rural Land*

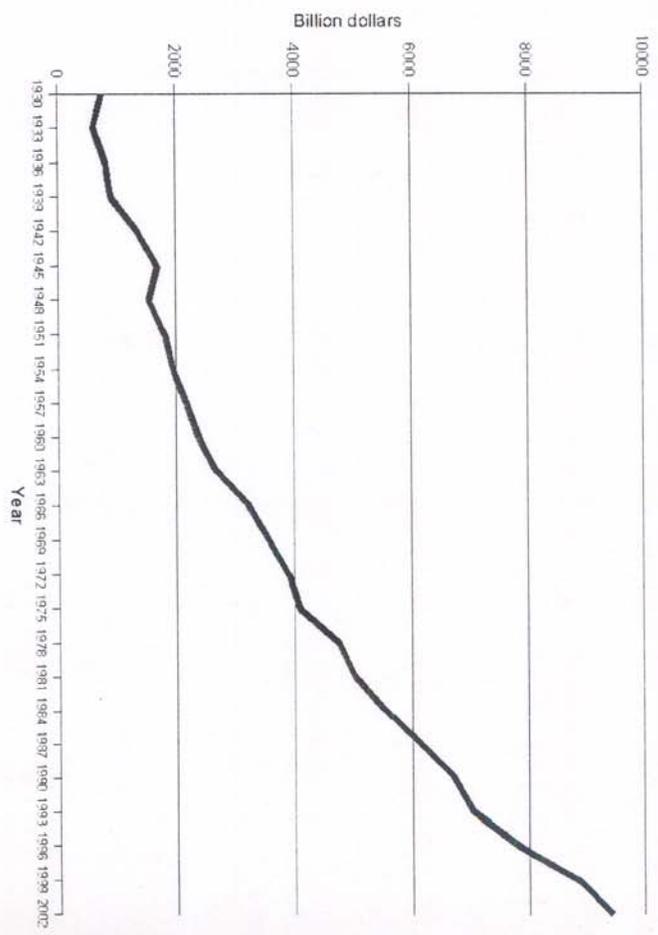
In Table 1, trends in the total land area by type of cover and use are listed for the years 1982 to 2001. As shown, forest land, water areas, and federal land have remained more or less constant in total acreage since 1982. Consequently, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land and developed land has increased (USDA, 1997). Decreasing have been cropland, pastureland, and, to a lesser extent, rangeland (USDA, 2003). In total, an estimated 33.5 million acres of non-federal rural land were developed between 1982 and 2001, a rate of almost 1.8 million acres per year nationally. Between 1997 and 2001, in just four years, the estimated annual rate of development of non-federal rural land was almost 2.2 million acres. As more of its land base is developed, the demise of the once dominant rural America is hastened.

*States with Greatest Rural Land Conversion*

By magnitude of rural area developed, nine of the top 20, six of the top 10, and all of the top three states are in the South. Texas tops the list with an annual rural-to-developed-land conversion between 1992 and 1997 of almost 179,000 acres per year. Georgia's conversion was almost as large for this period. Combined, Texas, Georgia and Florida, the top three states nationwide, saw more than 514,000 acres developed per year for the period 1992-97. The annual amount of development for the country for the five years of 1992-97 is more than 2.2 million acres.

*Fewer Farms and Less Land in Farms*

Two additional trends significantly influencing the rural land base during the past century have been increased mechanization and government price supports.



**Figure 5. Real gross domestic product, 1930-2002 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003).**

Together, these trends have encouraged farm owners to increase the size of individual farms, move toward greater crop specialization, and production of larger quantities of a more limited number of products. As a result of gains in efficiencies, fewer but larger farms are now needed to produce sufficient agricultural products to meet demand. Growing competition from non-agricultural land uses together with fewer, more specialized farms nationwide are the major factors behind the decline in overall farm acreage in the country.

**Economic Trends**

If judged by the size of Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Real GDP per capita, the U.S. economy keeps growing and people keep getting wealthier, with or without recessions. This is one of the most important and far-reaching megatrends in the United States, and all signs point toward continued long-term growth.

*Growth of the U. S. Economy*

The GDP is the most comprehensive and widely used economic measure in the U.S. Since the Great Depression, the story of the U.S.' economic growth can be told by tracking GDP, which is defined as the market value of all goods and services produced in a given year. Real GDP is a more specific economic measure, and as a measure of growth it is more accurate, since it is adjusted to account for price changes over time (i.e., inflation or deflation). The Real GDP trend line in Figure 5

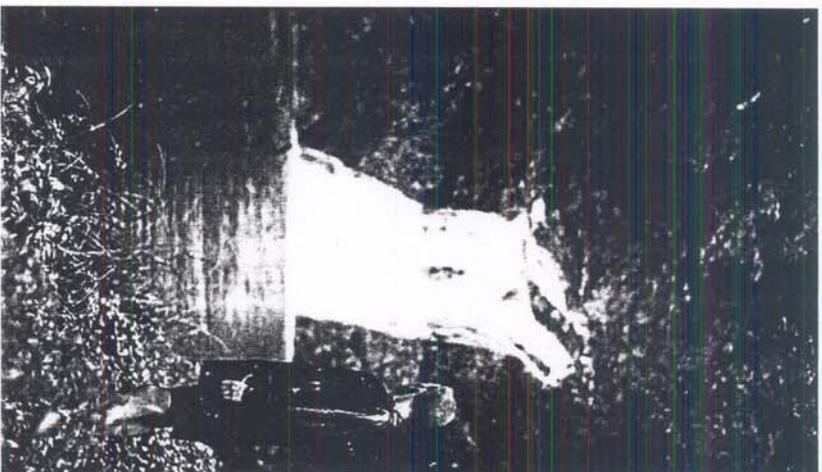
clearly shows that the size of the U.S. economy, in terms of the amount of material goods and services produced, has continued to increase over time. Relative to the rest of the world, the U.S. population is only 4.6 percent of world population, yet the U.S. economy represents almost one-third of global GDP (World Bank Group, 2003).

#### *Consumer Spending Trends*

The huge growth of the U.S. economy, both in terms of real GDP and real GDP per capita, reveals only a part of the U.S. economic story. GDP is composed of four major components: personal consumption expenditures (PCE), gross private domestic investment, net exports of goods and services, and government expenditures and gross investment. PCEs overwhelm the other three GDP components. But on what do Americans spend their incomes? Mostly, it is on material goods and services, and an increasing share of this spending has been going to services such as medical, financial, and recreation services. Over the past 20 years, PCEs on services has outpaced nondurable and durable goods expenditures. As of 2002, Americans spent 59 percent of personal consumption expenditures on services, 29 percent on nondurable goods, and 12 percent on durable goods (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003). Medical care has been the largest single services expenditure category, accounting in 2002 for 59 percent of all service expenditures. While Americans spend, one thing they do not do to any great extent is save. Since the end of World War II, gross savings as a percentage of GDP has been around 15-20 percent (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003).

#### **Outdoor Recreation**

Outdoor recreation is a highly significant aspect of American's lifestyles. Our country began in earnest to evaluate the significance of outdoor recreation in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During that period, the U.S. Congress created and funded the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) to study demand and supply of outdoor opportunities for Americans. From that time, trends in outdoor recreation are tracked using the National Recreation Survey Series that was begun by ORRRC (Cordell et al., 1996). In this section, we examine long and



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short-term trends in Americans' participation in outdoor recreation activities based on data from various applications of the National Recreation Survey.

#### *Historic Trends*

Since the first national recreation survey was conducted in 1960, the number of people legally living in this country has increased to more than 285 million. This is population growth of around 100 million in just 43 years. Obviously, population growth has been one of the dominant drivers of outdoor recreation participation growth. Other drivers include economic prosperity, improved personal equipment technology, and better information. Among outdoor activities growing fastest since 1960 were bicycling, camping, canoeing/kayaking and swimming. More recently, in the last 20 years, viewing or photographing birds has ranked as the fastest-growing activity in the United States. There are more than 50 million additional birding participants now than in the early 1980s. Following birding, other growth in the last 20 years include day hiking; backpacking; snowmobiling; attending outdoor concerts, plays and other events; walking for pleasure; camping in developed sites; canoeing or kayaking; running or jogging; downhill skiing; and; swimming in natural waters.

#### *Current Trends, Since 1995*

The most popular activities in 2000-01 (i.e., those having the most participants) included walking for pleasure, outdoor family gatherings, and visiting a beach. These are the same activities that were at the top of surveys in 1994-95. Of the overall 62 activities examined through the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, many at the top of the list, when ranked by percentage growth from 1994-95 to 2000-01, are physically demanding. Highly physical and challenging sports, such as kayaking, snowboarding, backpacking, and mountain climbing, typically require specialized equipment and skills that not everyone possesses. Together with larger numbers of people participating in outdoor activities, this means very noticeable differences between what one would have witnessed at a typical outdoor area in earlier times, such as in 1960, versus now. While many of the activities at or near the top of this list do not represent large numbers of added people (e.g., kayaking), others not much further down the list have increased more substantially. Numbers viewing and photographing wildlife, for example, have risen by over 34 million. Over the years, however, regardless of activity or region of the country, outdoor recreation has grown steadily as a significant land use.

#### **Implications for Natural Resources**

The World and especially the United States are changing at a pace unprecedented in history. Population growth, changing composition of the population, urban growth and sprawl, development of rural lands, economic growth, rising consumer spending, and outdoor recreation participation together have and will continue to change this country. There are five areas where these trends collectively will likely have profound consequences.

### *A Smaller Rural Land Base*

By the year 2025 the population of the United States is projected to grow to around 337 million. This is an additional 56 million persons in just 25 years. In large part due to this population growth, it is projected that the U. S. could lose an estimated 45± million acres of rural land to development between 2000 and 2025 (assuming continuation of the historical development rate). Thus, for each additional 1,000 people, there could be a corresponding loss to development of almost 804 acres of forest, range, pasture, cropland and other rural land. While this may seem small relative to the total land base of the United States, from another perspective, it is large. It is large because much of the rural land that is most subject to development often lies close to metropolitan areas, public lands, riparian areas, rivers, other water bodies, and prime agricultural land. Development is long-term, if not permanent, and future options for other uses are severely restricted. In addition, other rural land becomes more scarce and of higher market value, affordable usually to only a few of the highest bidders.

### *A More Fragmented Rural Land Base*

As growing population and wealth drive development of rural land for residential and commercial purposes, there typically will be added rounds of development and land modification for highways, railroads, utility corridors, water and sewage treatment facilities, fences, and other infrastructure to support residential and commercial developments. Combined, residential, commercial and infrastructure development usually result in significant fragmentation of natural ecosystems and habitat, a consequence that has been identified as perhaps the dominant ecological issue in contemporary United States. Few would argue against a conclusion that development and its associated infrastructure result in less naturally functioning land to serve as habitat for wildlife and aquatic species, and to provide clean air and water. In all likelihood, fragmentation will remain a highly significant ecological issue in the future as development of rural lands continues. As well, few would argue that the aesthetic and scenic character of rural lands is not greatly compromised by roads and other construction activity.

### *Disproportionate Pressures on Public Lands for Recreation and Raw Materials*

A natural and very predictable outcome of a shrinking and further fragmented private rural land base is greater pressure on public lands. In the 1990s, between 15 and 20 percent of rural private land had been open to the public for recreation. Recently, however, less of the private rural land base has been open for the public's use, shrinking to around 11 percent at the beginning of the 21st Century. Together with a shrinking overall rural land area, privately owned lands in the future are likely to play a smaller role in providing outdoor recreation and other land uses. As projections show continuing growth of outdoor recreation (Cordell et al., 1999), greater pressures are likely for the use of public lands, which are nearly constant in overall area and facility infrastructure over time.

In addition to outdoor recreation, there are growing demands for raw materials for manufacturing. Yet, rising numbers of rural land owners are more interested in protecting the natural character of their land than in commercial uses (Cordell et al., 1999). Public lands in some areas of the country may seem the only viable

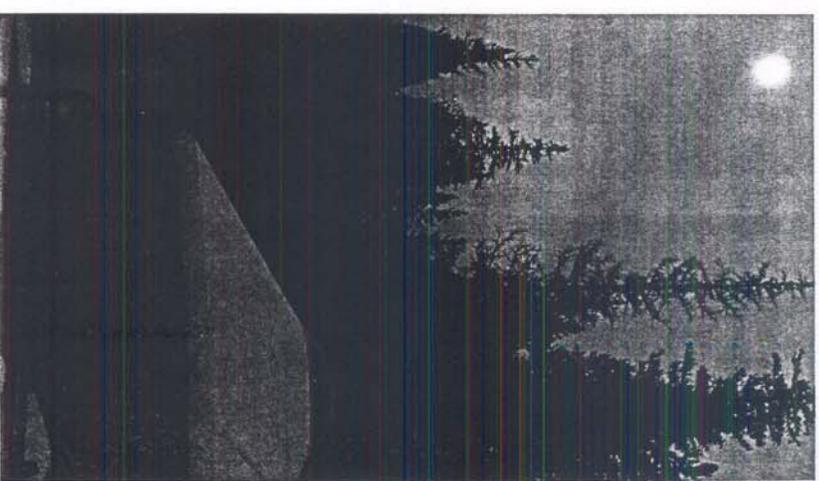
option for recreation, minerals, water, forage, timber, and other raw materials.

### *Greater Conflicts and Competition for Access*

As the uses of public lands and other rural lands grow and diversify, there undoubtedly will be greater competition for the space, resources and facilities they afford. This will and has been leading to greater conflicts and more competition for access. Interests in oil drilling, mining, timber harvesting, motorized outdoor recreation, non-motorized outdoor recreation, preservation, water diversions, and many other interests will increasingly compete for access to the resources, space, and amenities on public lands. These conflicts will not be resolved easily and will require well developed policy, legislation and in all likelihood, improved legal mitigation processes. It is imperative that the values and features of public lands held in highest esteem by the general public, more so than local or special interests, be a significant part of these proceedings. For the most part, the public considers clean water, protection for future generations, wildlife habitat, and naturalness as the most highly valued purposes for public forests (Tarrant, Cordell & Green, 2003). In the eyes of the public, these uses are often at odds with motorized and resource extraction uses.

### *Less Connection between People and the Land*

As population grows: as urban development expands; as more people live in urban surroundings; as people increasingly rely on air conditioning in the home, workplace or transportation; and as greater proportions of people work in service instead of farming or other on-the-land jobs, there is less and less connection between people and the land. Less "connectiveness" with forests, rangelands, watersheds or any other generally defined aspect of natural resources will mean less understanding of the relationships and dependency of human and all life on the natural world. In the United States, food, shelter, medicines, and other needs for most people are met by purchasing goods and services in grocery stores, pharmacies, and other commercial establishments. Not seen by the vast majority of people are the industrial croplands, pastures, forest operations, ranches, water diversion projects, and other operations from which the goods they purchase originate.



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Without such consciousness, people are challenged to understand the relationship between their lifestyle choices, their consumption patterns, and the management and condition of natural lands.

Where might this disconnect lead? One can only speculate. But, it is clear that in recent years rising economic wealth and real purchasing power has led to greater and greater consumption, more intensive and extensive use of natural resources and greater amounts of waste. Rising economic status for a substantial and growing number of Americans has also led to migration to rural areas for home development, and for many, to greater use of large, heavy, fuel inefficient vehicles of many kinds. Ability to afford large homes, fuel-hungry vehicles and consumptive lifestyles in many different forms has led to greater extraction of raw materials and demand of non-renewable energy. These increased demands in turn mean greater drilling, greater amounts of mining, larger farm operations and many other forms of on-the-land production operations to produce gasoline, home heating fuels, electricity, steel, water for irrigating, feed for meat animals, food for humans, and many other forms of increased production and consumption. While there are many, many wonderful aspects and comforts to our modern, consumptive society, one wonders how sustainable it is.

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