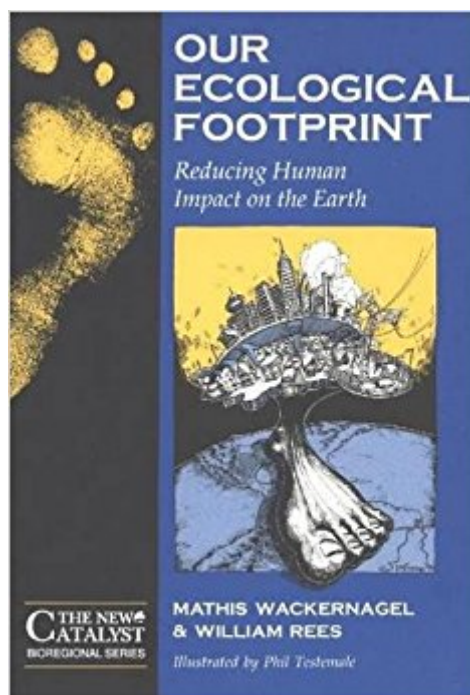


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# Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact On The Earth (New Catalyst Bioregional Series) (Paperback)



## Synopsis

An excellent handbook for community activists, planners, teachers, students and policy makers.

## Book Information

Paperback: 160 pages

Publisher: New Society Publishers; 9445th edition (July 1, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 086571312X

ISBN-13: 978-0865713123

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 18 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #557,486 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #99 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Canadian #164 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Civil & Environmental > Environmental > Pollution #506 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Sustainable Development

## Customer Reviews

Our Ecological Footprint presents an internationally-acclaimed tool for measuring and visualizing the resources required to sustain our households, communities, regions and nations, converting the seemingly complex concepts of carrying capacity, resource-use, waste-disposal and the like into a graphic form that everyone can grasp and use. An excellent handbook for community activists, planners, teachers, students and policy makers.

Mathis Wackernagel is currently the Executive Director of Global Footprint Network, and William Rees is the Chair of the School of Urban Planning and Regional Development at the University of British Columbia.

A very interesting book in that it provides metrics for the human ecological footprint. The footprint is the earth's carrying capacity turned upside down, so to speak. The idea is to balance our global footprint with the earth's total carrying capacity for humans and allow sufficient carrying capacity for other species, as well. The first two parts are fairly easy to understand. The graphics throughout are very helpful. Part 3 gets more technical about how to actually use the metrics, and may require some rereading and study. I did for me, and I think I am reasonably scientifically literate. It is worth

the read.

Back when Rees and Wackernagel wrote *Our Ecological Footprint*, no one was looking at the problem in that way. Now that everyone has jumped on the "our-planet-is-finite" bandwagon, we need to be reminded that this is where it started. Much research has been done since it came out, and some of the figures will no doubt be out of date, but it still belongs in every environmentally conscious person's collection. Buy it while you can! G. Bisailon

I am an environmental practitioner and I am researching on ecological footprint in my local region in Kenya. The best way is to start by reading the works of the pioneers of the subject. I love the book.

This book is especially important for readers interested in ecology, environmental science, geography and demography. A very important piece of published work that deserves more readership attention.

Professors Rees and Wackernagel have developed a new concept to assess individuals and countries impact on the environment, a quantitative measure which acts as a common denominator for all peoples, at all levels of affluence or poverty. This will become the yardstick of our future, like the invention of money by the Babylonians or Assyrians has become the unit of exchange in the trade of goods and services. Clearly written, the book is needed to be understood by all politicians, bankers, voters, leaders and living humans. Knowing ideas such as these is crucial and essential for our survival in the biosphere.

The GNP is a downright stupid way to measure the economic activity of a society, since the GNP really measures the destruction of nature. A tree is worth 0 USD until it is cut and sold as wood. A whale is worth 0 USD until it is caught and cut to pieces. What capitalism leaves behind is a total depletion of natural resources, and this is what we then call "progress" or "welfare". The authors lead us back to the basics, when they state : "We do not have a body, we are a body; we are not surrounded by an "environment"; we are an intimate part of the ecosphere." Therefore, they introduce an alternative indicator to the GNP, the Ecological Footprint (EF), which is certainly a much more intelligent way of measuring what finally really supports humankind. The EF "is estimated by calculating how much land and water area is required on a continuous basis to produce all the goods consumed, and to assimilate all wastes generated, by that population." This is

probably the greatest breakthrough in economic thought of the 20th century (however, it has not been rewarded with a Nobel prize, since those are only given to economists following mainstream capitalist dogma's, even if mainstream thinking means heading for doom, and heading fast). The authors call our attention to the fact that the EF has been changing throughout human history, with an exponential increase in the 20th century. In 1900 the US had an EF of about 1 ha/cap. This rose to about 2 ha/cap around 1950. In 1995 the US reached 5.1 ha/cap, showing a deficit of 80 % of its productive land surface. Japan has even a bigger deficit, requiring 8 times more than its net productive land surface to sustain its current production and consumption level. In this way, the EF also measures how "developed" countries depend on the "Third World" to sustain their production and consumption. The last 15 years we entered a new phase in capitalist development, with China and India trying to catch up with the western way of life. The authors warn us : "If everybody lived like today's North Americans, it would take at least two additional planet Earths to produce the resources, absorb the wastes, and otherwise maintain life-support. Unfortunately, good planets are hard to find..." The ecological carrying-capacity of spaceship Earth is limited. "Beyond a certain point, the material growth of the world economy can be purchased only at the expense of depleting natural capital and undermining the life-support services upon which we all depend." What capitalism believes in, money, is - in the end - totally worthless. You can't eat dollars, euros nor yens. The only real assets we have, as humankind, are oceans full of life, uncut tropical forests acting as the lungs of the planet, and fertile agricultural land. If we continue to fish beyond sustainability, if we continue cutting tropical forests, if we continue farming producing erosion, and above all, if we continue to believe that we really produce value in this way (in the form of money), we will end up totally broke. We should stop pretending to be homo sapiens and behave like fools ! We should begin acting in a wise way ! The solutions are really simple. It means transforming our consumption in a sustainable way, at all levels. A lot can be done at a personal level. It means producing your own electricity with solar panels. It means reducing your dependence on fossil fuels by transforming your home in a passive solar house. It means driving an electric car (Fiat will launch the Phylla with solar panels incorporated in the vehicle in 2010). It means buying organics, so that you not only help to sustain pesticide-free agriculture, fertilized with nutrient-rich compost, but even improve your health.

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