

*There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil
to one who is striking at the root.*

Endless Growth or the End of Growth?

Andy Kerr, President
Alternatives to Growth Oregon
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Alternatives to Growth
Oregon

205 SE Grand Ave., Suite 203
Portland, OR 97214-6101
503-222-0282
www.AGOregon.org

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INTRODUCTION

Anybody who wants Oregon to become another California raise your hand!

Seeing none, the question is now on the table: When do we stop growing to avoid becoming another California?

The Los Angeles River and the Hudson River were both once home to salmon. But their respective regions grew too much for the salmon to cope with.

In 1998, Governor John Kitzhaber said: “If I had the power, I’d turn off the spigot and keep Oregon as it is today.”¹

Amen.

What’s causing the “flow of the spigot,” and what is it doing to Oregon, and how do we turn it off?

Endless Growth

Population is increasing in the Pacific Northwest at twice the national rate and 50% more than global rates.² Portland State University’s Population Research Center projects that by 2025, the state’s population will be 4.3 million—about one million more than now.³

That is the equivalent of two more Portlands, or about eight more Salems or Eugenes, twenty Corvallis, fifteen more Beavertons or twenty-eight more Bends.

Where do we put the next million? And the million after that? And the million after that?

A 3% growth rate doubles our population in a generation.

A 1% growth rate doubles our population in a lifetime.

If Deschutes County’s current rate of growth of 4.8% continues, the population of the county will double in 15 years, and that will double again in another 15 years.⁴

Causes of Oregon’s Population Increase

What is causing Oregon’s population to increase? Alan Durning and Christopher Crowther, in their book *Misplaced Blame: The Real Roots of Population Growth*, identified five root causes.⁵

The first three are causes of so-called “natural increase”: births exceeding deaths. Two-fifths of Oregon’s population growth is due to natural increase.⁶

1. Poverty. The first factor is child poverty. Youth poverty is the single largest cause of high birthrates in North America. Outside of its poorest groups, Oregon does not have a high birthrate. The middle and upper

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class are at replacement levels. The poor do not seek pregnancy but are less aggressive in preventing it. They accept it when it happens because they don't see other options as available to them, such as college, career, etc. Parenting is one of the few, and one of the more rewarding, options potentially available to them.⁷

2. Sexual Abuse. The second root cause of population growth in the Northwest is sexual abuse. Victims of child sexual abuse often feel that having a child will help heal from the violation they have suffered. A child having a child can also be a ticket out of an abusive home.⁸

3. Inadequate Family Planning Services. The third root cause of population growth is inadequate family services. Ten percent of the babies born in the Northwest are unwanted at conception. They are accidents at a time when the mother wanted no more children.⁹

Three-fifths of Oregon's population increase is due to migration.

4. Subsidies to Domestic Growth. The fourth factor identified in Misplaced Blame is subsidies to domestic migration.¹⁰ (I'll address this root cause more later.)

5. Misguided Immigration Laws. The fifth and final factor is misguided immigration laws.

12% of Pacific Northwest immigration is from other nations. 70% of US immigrants come to California. Los Angeles is an immigrant-magnet city; Portland, Bend, Corvallis, Eugene, Salem, and Medford-Ashland are all native-magnet cities. Canada and the US, with 1/20th of the world's population, are home to one-fifth of the world's living international immigrants. Up to 70% of the US population increase in the next 50 years is projected to come from immigrants and their offspring.¹¹

US immigrants can be divided into three major categories:

- family reunifications;
- employment visas; and
- political refugees.

Family reunification is the reason for nearly three-fifths of US immigration. Under recent changes in US law, not only are spouses and minor children eligible for reunification, but so are the adult siblings of immigrant spouses.

The second category, about one-sixth of immigration, is employment visas. This includes highly skilled workers such as doctors and engineers and the low skilled such as farm workers. NAFTA and GATT are exporting US manufacturing to the cheap labor. You can't move farmland, so the cheap labor comes here.¹² High-tech firms apparently don't want to locate in India where there is a surplus of engineers.

The final one-sixth of US immigration is political refugees.¹³

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To those who support generous immigration, I ask you this: Why are you on the same side as Microsoft and the other huge computer corporations and of Archer Daniels Midland and the rest of the agribusiness lobby?

The United States ought to always be open to political refugees. But we should equally ensure that US government policies and the actions of our corporations are not causing people in other nations to become refugees.

Can we afford such a liberal policy of extended family reunifications? This pool of potential immigrants grows exponentially.

Can the source countries afford it? Immigration to the US results in brain drain from the developing world. 100% of the 50,000 Chinese students that China sends to the US each year swear they will go back to China after their schooling. Up to 99% look for jobs in America instead,¹⁴ thus doing a great disservice to fellow citizens. Three quarters of all foreign medical students in the United States do not return home.¹⁵ Immigrants are the potential leaders that ought to be leading either reform movements or revolutions in their native countries.

Allowing workers into this nation, corrodes the prospects of both our poor and middle-class, further diminishing the value of their labor.

Illegal immigration is one-fourth of all immigration and must be stopped. But we should spend equivalent resources on Europeans who fly in and overstay their tourist visas as we are for Latinos who walk or swim in without visas.

Immigration is a very divisive and sensitive issue that nonetheless must be discussed. To those who support generous immigration, I ask you this: Why are you on the same side as Microsoft and the other huge computer corporations and of Archer Daniels Midland and the rest of the agribusiness lobby? How can you support a policy that helps ensure that our existing poor will never be adequately valued for their labor?

To those who oppose immigration because of racist and/or xenophobic reasons, I say to you: Go to hell. The issue is immigration, not immigrants.

I come to my support of immigration reform from an ecological carrying-capacity perspective. Be it a house, a block, a city, a watershed, a state, a bioregion, a nation, a continent, or a planet; all have a carrying capacity.

Growth Management Not Enough

Population is increasing in Oregon. This we know. Our choice now is how much—if at all—do we want to grow in the future.

A recent debate on expanding the Portland Metro Urban Growth Boundary was a debate on how, not whether, to grow—in both population and land area. The choice was reduced to two options: sprawl like Los Angeles or densify like Los Angeles. (Yes, LA is more densely populated than Portland.) The course chosen by Metro was to do both. The option of not growing—or even slowing growth—was not considered.

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Ironically, surveys reveal that overpopulation and becoming another California are the greatest fears of Oregonians.¹⁶ Only 2% of Oregonians think the state's population is "too small." 65% think that we are "the right size." Remarkably, 29% think our state's population is already "too large."¹⁷

Growth is a race one loses the faster one runs.

A quarter century ago, Governor Tom McCall was worried about growth. He led the state to adopt a critically acclaimed land use planning program. McCall apparently hoped that planning could adequately mitigate the impacts of growth. He said in 1973:

*Sagebrush subdivisions, coastal condomania, and the ravenous rampage of suburbia in the Willamette Valley all threaten to mock Oregon's status as the environmental model for the nation.*¹⁸

Tom—wherever you are—we have those sagebrush subdivisions, coastal condomania and the ravenous rampage of suburbia. But, I must say, they are well planned. Rather than sprawl dotting the landscape like poxes, instead the sprawl is spreading like gangrene across the land.

Planning alone—in the face of population increase—cannot keep Oregon Oregon.

Oregonians should not be misled into believing that planning is all we must—or can—do to maintain livability.

Oregon is on its way to becoming a better-planned California; the Willamette Valley another Puget Sound, and Portland a Los Angeles with light rail (maybe).

Metro says:

*We can all see the effects of rapid growth on our highways, housing, shopping and open spaces. But growth doesn't have to just happen. (Metro) provides planning services... so that we can maintain our livability while planning for the next 50 years of growth.*¹⁹

"(M)aintain our livability" and "50 years of growth"?

Pick one, and call me back.

"But growth doesn't have to just happen" says Metro. Alternatives to Growth Oregon says: "But growth just doesn't have to happen."

Like an adult human, Oregon has matured; any further growth is either fat or cancer.

"'Smart growth' is an oxymoron," said my favorite billionaire Ted Turner. "'Less-stupid Growth' would be a better name," he said. Ted does have six children. In response to a reporter's question he said: he had all his children by the age of 30, he didn't know any better, and "once they were here, I couldn't shoot them."²⁰

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We could book our favorite fishing hole or mountaintop through Ticketmaster, but is that the Oregon we want to live in?

The planning establishment tells us that Oregon is doing a better job of growth management than anywhere else. The fact that Portland—today or tomorrow—is—or will be—more livable than Newark, Los Angeles, Dallas, Mexico City, or Calcutta is of little comfort. I am only interested in an Oregon that is at least as good to live in 2040 as it is today.

Slow growth is like being in an airplane that is going to inevitably crash, but it takes a long time. Smart growth is that you get to ride in first class while the plane is going down.

The only smart growth is no growth.

Remember Isaiah 5:8:

*Woe unto them that join house to house,
that lay field to field
till there be no place that they may be placed
alone in the midst of the Earth*

To those who believe that if Oregon simply did better and more planning and growth management, that livability can be maintained, I ask why they believe we will do better in the next 25 years than we did in the last quarter century. As that great environmentalist Jeanne Kirkpatrick once said, “history is a better guide than good intentions.”

The Environmental and Social Costs of Population Growth in Oregon

But, you protest, Oregon’s livability has increased during the last 25 years. In some ways it has. In many ways it has not. By some measurements, per capita pollution has decreased. But, we have more capitas. Portland’s downtown and many neighborhoods are in many ways more livable than they were 25 years ago, but this is in spite of—not because of—population growth.

Consider air quality. Even though Portland’s population has increased 50% since 1970—the passage of the Clean Air Act—the city’s view of Mount Hood is the best in a generation. Two decades ago city haze was so bad the mountain could be seen only 35% of the time on clear days. Now it is visible more than twice as often. The reason is technological improvements of factories, wood stoves, and automobiles. But technology has its limits. Planners estimate that air quality will peak between 2001-2010 as population overwhelms the technological gains.²¹

(Speaking of Mount Hood, the current Forest Service effort to limit

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the use of the Mount Hood Wilderness to protect legally required solitude is but another manifestation of excessive population.)

How about water quality? In the Portland metropolitan area, where one-half of the state's population lives, most residents drink unfiltered water from the relatively pristine Bull Run Watershed. Relatively little chlorine is needed to treat the water.

Population growth is propelling plans to drink from a watershed where over 70% of the state's residents live²² and excrete. 93% of all Willamette River fish have dioxin in their tissues.²³ Dioxin is the most toxic man-made chemical that we know of.²⁴ Since 1995, toxic chemical discharges into the Willamette Basin have nearly doubled.²⁵ So much for all that clean industry we've attracted.

The intake for this new Wilsonville water filtration plant would be just downstream from a stretch of the river where up to 74% of the squawfish have skeletal deformities—including 3-eyed fish.²⁶ The only reason to drink from the Willamette is that the region has “outgrown” the Bull Run Watershed.

What about traffic? Planners have estimated that to maintain the existing “quality of traffic” and to accommodate the next 20 years of population increase in the Portland area, \$13.5 billion would have to be spent on roads and other transportation. Such would include, among other things, double decking all the freeways. Planners estimate that perhaps \$3.5 billion could be found, but only if the voters approve a 2¢ per gallon increase in the gas tax each year for the next 20 years. The voters soundly defeated a modest 5¢ per gallon increase in the state gas tax in 2000 by approximately an 8-1 margin.²⁷

Rather than concluding that the accommodation of such growth and maintaining livability were incompatible, instead the planners lowered their, and by our acquiesce, all of our expectations. Since we can only reasonably expect about \$2.3 billion to be available, you can count on congestion levels increasing 685% over 1994 levels.²⁸

What is intolerable traffic today will be commonplace tomorrow. If you wanted to fully maintain existing quality of traffic, we'd have to raise the gas tax to \$1.54 per gallon and build lots of freeways. In any case, we'll have 24-hour traffic reports, even on weekends.

Eugene planner Eben Fodor, in his book, *Better, Not Bigger* identified these factors, which are detrimentally affected by growth:

- air quality;
- water quality;
- water quantity;
- quiet quality;
- mobility;
- fish and wildlife habitat;
- community.²⁹
- cost of housing;
- cost of living;
- freedom and democracy;
- crime;
- less safety;
- scenery and open space; and

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Fodor, in his report, The Cost of Growth in Oregon found that each new house costs the taxpayers at least \$33,000 in infrastructure costs.³²

Consider the loss of democracy and freedom. As there are more of us, each vote is worth less. As there are more of us, we are closer together, and therefore need more rules and regulations to maintain a semblance of a civil society.

But you say, Oregon has the best land use laws in the country. They have protected farmland, forest, and other open spaces from development. Urban growth boundaries protect us from sprawl. Oh, really? As population grows, urban growth boundaries are expanded to always have a 20-year supply of developable land.³⁰ Any person can see that at some point—in our lifetimes—where all the urban growth boundaries in the Willamette Valley touch either each other or public forestlands. Urban growth boundaries are more accurately called urban growth bungies.

In areas of population growth, the urban growth “boundaries” also require increased density. This is causing a political backlash to land use planning.³¹

The Economic Costs of Population Growth in Oregon

Despite the promises of developers and their chorus—chambers of commerce, most government officials, much of the media, etc.—the significant and rapid population increase of the last two decades has not lowered taxes. In fact, it has raised them as the cost of providing services to new industry and residents far exceeds any taxes they might pay.

Fodor, in his report, *The Cost of Growth in Oregon* found that each new house costs the taxpayers at least \$33,000 in infrastructure costs.³² Most of these costs are not paid by either the developer or the new house owner. What does he mean by “infrastructure?”:

- schools;
- storm drainage;
- water;
- parks and recreation;
- fire;
- natural gas distribution;
- electric power generation and distribution.³³
- sewers;
- transportation system;
- solid waste.
- police;
- library;
- open space; and

For every three new houses you see in Oregon, you don't see a firefighter, police officer, schoolteacher, or librarian.

In the name of jobs, taxpayers also subsidize corporations.

Some evidence exists, and more research is necessary, that most of these new jobs go to people who don't already live in the area.³⁴

Is anyone surprised that tax revolts closely follow periods of population increase?

If all this growth has been so good and has paid for itself, how come Oregon's State Park System of 94,330 acres³⁵ has added only one new park—a mere 180 acres—since 1971.³⁶ During that time, our population has increased 50% and our once-heralded state park system has increased in size 0.0019% (nineteen ten-thousandths of one percent). The quality of the park system has also decreased dramatically.

As the Governor's Task Force on Growth noted, growth exacerbates government revenue problems; it does not relieve them.³⁷ Tax money that used to pay for existing government services is being diverted to subsidize growth. Popular government services—such as libraries—are increasingly funded through voter-approved serial levies and bond measures. Politicians know the voters will approve such measures, but wouldn't approve of their tax moneys going to subsidize new industry and new residents.

It is not just our large cities that are losing their quality of life, but the small towns of Oregon as well. Amazingly, small businesses in these towns seek growth, or at least they do until the town grows enough for Wal-Mart to come in and blow away the downtown.

It would be cheaper for local government to buy up all the undeveloped land within their borders to prevent—rather than subsidize—its development.³⁹

The Taxpayer Costs of Population Growth in Oregon

How are citizens and taxpayers affected by these subsidies to growth? Fodor identified five:

1. Increased taxes;
2. increased financial debt (usually as municipal bonds);
3. infrastructure debt (falling behind on needed facilities to accommodate growth);
4. facility maintenance debt (diverting maintenance funds to accommodate new growth); and
5. reduction in public services (shorter library hours).³⁸

Yes, we Oregonians are paying to foul our own nest.

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The End of Growth

Some Oregon planners and politicians find humor—or at least irony—in the following statements:

Oregonians hate sprawl. Oregonians hate density.⁴⁰

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*How clean do we want
our water and air?*

*How crowded do we
want our classrooms
and roads?*

*Do we want enough
salmon to eat? Do we
want salmon just hang-
ing on? Do we want
salmon at all?*

These attitudes are contradictory only if one accepts the premise that growth is inevitable. Growth is neither desirable nor inevitable. Oregon can plan for no growth. Such can also be the first choice of government as it already is of its citizens. We can have a healthy economy and a stable population. We need only to look to Western Europe and Japan.

A member of the Governor's Task Force on Growth, a developer from Ashland, said he "could live with 2 million more people in Oregon (or) "however many God wants to send us."⁴¹

Lord knows we have enough people in Oregon now.

The question is not "how many people can we tolerate to stuff in our state," but rather "what is Oregon's optimal population?"

Will growth stop only when the quality of life in Oregon is perceived to be no better than elsewhere?

To answer what's best—what is an optimal population for Oregon?—we need to have a statewide conversation where we decide on the kind of Oregon we want.

How clean do we want our water and air?

How crowded do we want our classrooms and roads?

Do we want enough salmon to eat? Do we want salmon just hanging on? Do we want salmon at all?

Do we all want to ride the bus and live in apartment buildings?

After we answer these and similar questions, it is a simple matter for the planners to develop models which tell us how many Oregonians we can have and still have what we decide is a necessary and desirable quality of life.

After plugging our assumptions and desires in the model, what will we find?

That Oregon's present population of 3.3 million people is optimal? If so, we need to stop so it doesn't become suboptimal.

Or that we've undershot Oregon's optimal population? If so, we need to figure out how to attain optimality as soon as possible.

Or that we've overshot Oregon's optimal population? If so, we need to figure out how to return to a sustainable level as soon as possible.

Personally, I think we have overshot. Scientists have estimated that if we want everyone on Earth to have a Western European/North American/Japanese standard of living; and assuming easily obtainable efficiency improvements in energy and materials use, leaving room for nature and living off solar income, this Earth can support about two billion people—that works out to about 200 million Americans—in the long run.⁴² Worldwide, we have six, going on eight to twelve billion.

Astronomers are looking for other planets like Earth, but they haven't found one yet, let alone three more. And if they do, maybe they are

already full. Maybe those inhabitants are looking for our planet for the very same reason. That would actually explain a lot, wouldn't it?

Interpolating for Oregon, this means, about one million people, not three million. We had one million in my parents' lifetime. If everyone who wants children limits themselves no more than two, Oregon could be at one million in another lifetime. No one has to leave early to achieve a sustainable population.

Am I right? Who knows? Let's discuss it. We're not even asking—let alone answering—this vital question.

Let us recognize and embrace limits now that are optimal; not wait to have limits imposed because we have no other choice.

Is the Problem Population or Consumption?

Some argue that the absolute level of population is out of control and must be limited. Others argue that the real issue is consumption—especially in the overdeveloped United States. An average American consumes twenty-four times the resources of the average Bangladeshi.⁴³

The American consumes way too much and the Bangladeshi not enough.

Excessive population and consumption is a global problem and a local problem.

The average American now consumes at least 122 pounds of raw material every day.⁴⁴

Sustaining all of the current residents on Earth at the average American lifestyle would require four more Earths. Eight more, if you want to leave room for nature.⁴⁵

The issue is partly—but not entirely—a matter of equity. If resource consumption and resultant pollution continues to rise, it won't make enough difference that population is stabilized. Similarly, if recycling doubles, nothing is gained if population also doubles.

The problem is not population or consumption. It is both.

Governor Kitzhaber is to be applauded for his executive order on sustainability.⁴⁶ It is bold and, hopefully, precedent setting. However, one cannot reach sustainability just addressing per capita consumption. One also must address the absolute number of capitas.

*“Grow for the sake of
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a cancer cell”*

- Edward Abbey

No Linear Relationship Between Consumption and Happiness

“Grow for the sake of growth is the ideology of a cancer cell” said Edward Abbey.⁴⁷ It is also the ideology of developers.

At some point growth will stop. Why not stop it now, before it's too late?

Most estimates project the global population leveling off at around 10

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Does that third television, that third garage make you three times happier than the first?

billion in the middle of this century. When population levels off, what happens to the growth economy then? And what happened to our environment and elbowroom?

What kind of an economy do we have that depends upon an ever-growing population and rate of consumption?

From 1970 to 1996, the average house size in the US went from 1,385 to 2,060 square feet, an increase of 29%.⁴⁸ At the same time, occupancy of the average house has dropped 16%.⁴⁹

From 1970 to 1979 in the Pacific Northwest, population increased about 65% while households increased 110%.⁵⁰ A significant portion of this increase is due to divorce.

In 1993, 9,400,000 Americans owned second or more homes.⁵¹ 1998, on any given night, 600,000 Americans were homeless.⁵²

In 1992, Americans were four and one-half times richer than our great-grandparents were at the beginning of the last century.⁵³ Were we four and one-half times happier? Does that third television, that third garage make you three times happier than the first?

The practice of thrift by our grandparents has died out. The adage of “use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without” has been replaced with “Buy it up, toss it out, buy some more, don’t do without.”

Do you want more stuff or do you want more time? The average Oregonian is working 278 hours more each year—seven 40-hour weeks—than we did 20 years ago.⁵⁴ American parents in 1991 spend 40% less time with their children than they did in 1965.⁵⁵

We have more shopping centers in America than high schools.⁵⁶

A result of global mass media is that we are no longer trying to keep up with the Jones’ next door, but with the Gates’.

Sen. Avel Gordly asked, “At what point do we question the whole notion of creating wealth for the sake of having dollars and give that more value than creating community?”⁵⁷

When asked, Americans who reported being very happy were no more numerous in 1991 than in 1957.⁵⁸

The Gross Domestic Product is going up. How good is that? The GDP is merely a summing of financial transactions. Hurricanes, HIV-AIDS, and war all increase the GDP. (They also create jobs.) The GDP has nearly tripled since 1950.⁵⁹

Robert F. Kennedy, speaking in 1968 said:

We will find neither national purpose nor personal satisfaction in a mere continuation of economic progress, in an endless amassing of worldly goods. We cannot measure national spirit by the Dow Jones Average, nor national achievement by the gross national product. For the gross national product includes air pollution and advertising for cigarettes, and ambulances to clear our highways of the carnage. It counts special locks for our doors, and jails for our people who break

them. The gross national product includes the destruction of the redwoods, and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm and missiles and nuclear warheads.... It includes Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the broadcasting of television programs which glorify violence to sell goods to our children.

And if the gross national product includes all of this, there is much that it does not comprehend. It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of our streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of public officials.... The gross national product measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile; and it can tell us everything about America—except whether we are proud to be Americans.⁶⁰

A think tank called Redefining Progress has developed The Genuine Progress Indicator—the “GPI”—that assigns dollar values to such things as crime, family breakdown, underemployment, and the loss of species and farmland reveals that GPI increased from 1950 to 1970, along with GDP. However, GPI has had a steady decline since then.⁶¹

So have other indices of social welfare. Oregon Well-Being Index tracked well with the state GDP from 1980 to 1992. Since then the state GDP has risen dramatically, while the Well-Being of Oregonians Index has remained nearly flat. The projections are for an even larger disconnect.⁶²

Finally, the Fordham Index of Social Health gone down as GDP has risen.⁶³

GDP may have once been a good way to measure progress and well being, but it isn't any longer.

Sometimes One Has To Choose

As Americans, we are not used to having to choose. We want it all, and often have gotten it all. But if a city chooses to grow for the supposed benefits such population increase brings, then that city will inevitably lose other values. You can't have small-town values in a big city.

Consider the effort to bring a major league baseball franchise to Portland. First, it is the nature of the industry to play off city against city to see which will give the franchise the most to come or stay. Free stadiums, other tax breaks, etc. Our taxes will have to go up if we want to go out to the old ball game. Second, a franchise needs a population base, larger than Portland has now, to have an adequate fan base to

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make the venture pay.

Name me a city with a major league baseball franchise that doesn't also have major league tax subsidies and major league congestion.

Sometimes you have to choose.

A Growth-Free Future

What would a growth-free future look like? We need only to look to Japan and Europe to see that an economy doesn't need population increase to be healthy.

If population growth ended in Oregon, a whole set of problems would be avoided, be truly be solvable, or be alleviated, including:

- Not having to drink water out of the Willamette River (3-eyed fish);
- Actually improving air quality (regularly seeing the Cascade Peaks);
- Not having sprawl (nor densification);
- Improving transportation (alternatives to the car);
- Rebuilding our cities (to favor people more than automobiles);
- Revitalizing our economic infrastructure (roads, schools, communications);
- Restoring our natural infrastructure (bring back the salmon);
- Restructuring our economy to make it energy and materials efficient (with as much cold beer and hot showers as we want);
- We'd have the resources to directly address poverty and child abuse (let's wage another war on poverty and this time win it);
- We'd all work less (The US Senate voted for the 30-hour week in 1933⁶⁴);
- We'd all have more time for ourselves (Prozac and cocaine consumption would decline);
- We'd all have more time for our families (the problem of latch key kids goes away); and
- We'd all have more time for our communities (volunteering to help).

A few Oregonians are making quite a killing on growth, some are making a living on growth, while most Oregonians are paying for growth that is killing the Oregon we love.

A few Oregonians are making quite a killing on growth, some are making a living on growth, while most Oregonians are paying for growth that is killing the Oregon we love.

Alternatives to Growth Oregon supports economic progress based on appropriate technological improvement, increased realization of human potentials, and energy and materials efficiency. It opposes economic growth that depends on increased population and/or consumption. Making our economy more productive and efficient is desirable—as is the creation of meaningful work for all. Making it more consumptive is not.

The motto of Alternatives to Growth Oregon is: “Better, Not Bigger.”

CONCLUSION

Do I have all the answers? Of course not. I have some ideas and so do you. To come up with the right answers, we first have to ask the right questions. So far, we've been afraid to ask ourselves questions like: "What is Oregon's optimal population?" "Is growth desirable? Is growth inevitable?"

I hope by now that I've convinced you that the Oregon we love is like a car speeding toward a cliff. While many disagree on the rate of speed, or the distance left to the cliff, those are details that in the end don't matter.

While I've hopefully convinced you that Oregon must end growth, I haven't talked about how to end growth in Oregon. That is the subject of another talk.⁶⁵ When people first think of not driving the car over the cliff, their first thought is that the only alternative is to immediately run into a brick wall. Neither alternative is attractive. Somewhere between the cliff and the brick wall is a path toward sustainability. But to find it and take it, Oregon must first take its foot off the accelerator.

25 years and 57 million less Americans and one million less Oregonians ago, a Nixon commission on population noted:

*There would be no benefits to a growing population, that the health of our economy does not depend upon it, that the life of the average citizen is not enhanced by it, that democratic representation is diluted by it and that most of our serious problems would be easier to solve if we stopped growing.*⁶⁶

Governor Kitzhaber, try it. You might just find that you do have the power to turn off the spigot.

Any good cause is a lost cause if we don't stabilize population at sustainable levels.

While we must plan for growth, let us also have—as our first choice—a plan not to grow.

The only thing more radical than the end of growth is continuing to grow.

Andy Kerr is founder and president of Alternatives to Growth Oregon (www.AGOregon.org, 503/222-0282), a membership organization dedicated to bringing about an end to population and consumption growth, and to the promotion of true economic, personal, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth by supporting policies that move Oregon toward sustainability. He is also president of The Larch Company (the western larch has a contrary nature as a deciduous conifer) and writes on and agitates for the environment. He lives in Oregon's Rogue Valley and may be reached at andykerr@AGOregon.org

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