

AGO Report

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Winter 2001-2002



Educating the Next Generation of Voters and Activists

We've all heard of teens who have converted their non-recycling families to the best recyclers on the block or who have finally badgered their smoking parents into "kicking the habit." Educating teens can have a ripple effect through society. That is AGO's hope with our new high school education project Living Within Limits.

Today's youth face a daunting future. Global climate change threatens entire ecosystems. 50% of the world's wetlands have been lost in one century. 50% of the world's forests have been cleared. 70% of the world's major marine fisheries have been depleted. And nearly 60% of coral reefs are at risk. The Earth's natural resources are being liquidated to support more people consuming more resources. By most projections, our youth face a future with more people, pollution, waste, and less nature.

Instead of getting factual information about the future they face, American youth are some of the most commercially exploited groups in the US. Annually, advertisers spend \$2 billion on advertising directed at children – 20 times the amount spent just 10 years ago. Apparently it's working. Children's

spending has roughly doubled every ten years for the past three decades, and has tripled in the 1990's. We are raising "super-consumers."

This fall, AGO and the Columbia Group of the Sierra Club came together to begin presenting 50 minute programs on population and consumption to Oregon high school students. Living Within Limits is an interactive program that seeks to increase students' awareness of population and consumption growth, and challenges them to consider positive steps they can take in their personal lives about spending, consumption and family size that will contribute to a sustainable future. Many youth are unaware of their impact on the natural world or on people around the world who struggle for basic food water and shelter.

Volunteer Training

On October 26th, approximately 20 volunteers gathered at Portland State University to participate in a training for Living Within Limits. Participants included volunteers from AGO, the Columbia Group of the Sierra Club, and AGO Board members. Enthusiasm ran high as we went through the 50-minute program we'll be presenting to the high school students. In the after-

Alternatives to Growth Oregon

AGO strives to leave succeeding generations of Oregonians a more economically prosperous, environmentally healthy, and socially just State by encouraging progress toward a sustainable society, and discouraging growth focused on increased population and consumption.

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noon we were all inspired by John Goekler of Facing the Future, a non-profit organization in Washington State, who presented his curriculum, *Population: Issues, Impacts and Solutions*. John presented several of the activities,

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Living Within Limits: Program Highlights

Living Within Limits begins with the video, "World Population" produced by Zero Population Growth, which is an excellent illustration of human population growth over time. The video elicits lots of "wows" and leads to the next activity, "Earthday Cake" in which a cake is divided up according to consumption of resources around the world, rather than by numbers of people. This activity is used to explore issues of ecological footprints, scarcity, fairness, and includes a discussion of ways in which we can limit our consumption.

The program concludes with the students developing solutions to these complex issues. If we have time, we also do a valuing activity in which students take a stand - agreeing or disagreeing - on statements related to population and consumption. After the program, we leave the teacher with materials for a possible follow-up activity. Throughout the program, we focus on the choices we make everyday and how those choices affect the natural world, our communities, and people around the world.

THANK YOU!

The Conservation and Research Foundation recently awarded Alternatives to Growth Oregon a generous grant in support of our education efforts with the Living Within Limits program.

Executive Director's Report

Candice Guth

It's been a year since I started as Executive Director of AGO. That year has been an exciting roller coaster ride of successes and some disappointments. Unfortunately, it has also been a demanding year, and a recently diagnosed family illness has brought me to a decision to resign from my position at AGO.

I have been a part of AGO since it's beginning. I represented the Audubon Society of Portland on the steering committee that put on the Alternatives to Growth conference in 1997. I joined the AGO Board at the inception of the organization in 1998.

Since the first Earth Day in 1970, I have been passionately convinced that unless our nation addresses the problems of a fast growing population and unsustainable levels of consumption, we will never solve the environmental and social problems that we face. And, future generations will be unable to experience the wonders of the natural world that we have. During the last year, that conviction has only strengthened.

I have met with people from all over the state and with population activists from other states. We have discussed the future if we fail to come to grips with the growth that is destroying our quality of life and our natural environment. To many, that bleak future seems inevitable. But AGO's greatest strength is that we have outlined many, many solutions (see pages 4 & 5), for a society that finds the public will to address the threats we face.

During the last year, AGO has experimented with ways to gain public and media attention and influence

policy decisions. We introduced legislation, met with elected officials, spoke to civic, community and environmental groups, met with the media and had articles and opinion pieces about and by AGO appear in newspapers throughout the state. We've joined with other groups such as the Columbia Chapter of the Sierra Club and Facing the Future in developing high school programs about population and consumption. We were disappointed when the Coalition for a Livable Future stuck their head in the sand and denied us membership because of our willingness to tackle difficult issues. And, our plans for a 2002 ballot measure that would require a sustainable population in Oregon within a generation were delayed by the horrific events of September 11th.

So much goes in to keeping an organization afloat. Membership drives, grantwriting and fund appeals, newsletters, member meetings, website updates, budgeting. Always being ready when the media calls. Establishing priorities with only three people and limited resources. And most of all, being answerable to you, our members for your support. Keeping you informed and excited about our successes and our strategies.

At the end of this year and after all of the experimenting, I am optimistic. I believe that the planned Oregon ballot measure will command the attention and excitement of the public and the media. With it, we will finally begin that much needed discussion about population and consumption levels that will allow for a sustainable future. I believe that with your continued support, we will succeed. Thanks to you all.

ACTION ALERT

Contact Your Metro Councilors!

Metro Councilor Bill Atherton has introduced an ordinance to the Metro Council (Portland Regional Government) that calls for periodic elections that would give voters the choice to end subsidies to growth. In a May 2001 Metro poll, only 21% said that existing residents should share (with developers and new residents) paying for the costs of growth. Metro should respond to that sentiment by adopting this legislation that calls for an election in May 2002 - and let voters decide who should pay for growth! The Community Protection Act is Ordinance No 01-922. It will be referred to Metro's Community Planning Committee, which is a committee of the whole council chaired by Councilor Rod Park.

From the legislation: "By their vote, citizens will specify the nature and extent of spending and taxing

choices Metro may make that relate to the fiscal impacts of growth. A growth-neutral policy, if adopted by voters, would have the effect of moderating growth by reducing the level of specified public subsidies. Conversely, if voters reject a growth-neutral policy and choose to promote growth; then this chapter would allow Metro to maintain or increase subsidies, or reduce standards of service, to promote population growth in the region."

What You Can Do

- Contact your Metro Councilor and let them know of your support for this important legislation.
- Attend a hearing in December or January to express your support. Watch your email for an action alert with hearing dates and times.

Living Within Limits

Con't from page 1

and ended his presentation with a discussion of dominant worldviews and encouraged us to think differently about solving the challenges of the future. Many thanks to John and Facing the Future for donating this workshop to us!

Next Steps

The program is off to a strong start with 20 trained and eager volunteer presenters, enthusiastic teachers calling us to set up programs, and students beginning to consider their personal lifestyle choices. We have

already presented eight programs, and eleven more are scheduled this month! (We were getting calls from teachers even before the letters went out describing our program!) If you are interested in getting involved with Living Within Limits, contact Sarah Bidwell at (503) 222-0282.

** Although the Sierra Club and Alternatives to Growth Oregon differ in some areas relating to the subject of human population growth, we have come together to offer this program because we believe so strongly in the core information being presented.*

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OF COURSE WE C

American society has chosen to increase both population and consumption levels by having enacted tax and other policies—as well as a system of subsidies, incentives and disincentives to encourage that growth. If American society now chooses to have sustainable levels of population and consumption, tax and other policies could be restructured to achieve a sustainable society. Ending growth is no different than solving any other problem—it simply requires the will. Here are just some of the ways.¹

What Individuals Can Do!

- If you want to have children, have no more than two, and preferably one.
- Restrain your own consumption and pursue a sustainable lifestyle.
- Make every pregnancy a wanted pregnancy. (As recently as 1994, 49% of all pregnancies were unintended. [*Family Planning Perspectives*, Jan./ Feb. 1998] Free, available and affordable family planning for everyone who wants it would have an enormous impact on reducing this rate.)
- Make population and consumption political issues.
- Become an activist in the sustainability movement.
- Demand that those who profit from exploitation of the environment bear the costs.
- Reduce the workweek and find time for family and other interests.

- Demand campaign finance reform.
- Make corporations accountable.
- Demand a reversal of globalization of trade and finance by supporting local economies.

What Governments Can Do!

- Make growth pay its way by:
 - ending subsidies of tax dollars to new housing development;
 - ending incentives for industry to move to your community; and
 - ending corporate welfare.
- Make tax policies encourage a sustainable society by:
 - restructuring the tax system to encourage small families and discourage large ones;
 - restructuring the tax system to encourage efficient consumption and discourage wasteful consumption;
 - replacing the income tax with a progressive consumption tax; and
 - shifting the property tax on land and improvements to a tax only on land.
- Have state government determine their states' optimal population and ecological carrying capacity.
- Reconsider immigration policies so that they contribute to a sustainable population.
- Replace the minimum wage with a livable wage.
- Wage a real war on poverty.
- Provide full funding for family

Top 10 Act Population and Co

1. If you want children, have
2. Restructure the tax system to encourage small families and discourage large ones.
3. Support full funding for
4. Make every pregnancy a
5. Restructure the tax system to encourage efficient consumption and discourage wasteful consumption.
6. Replace the minimum wage with a livable wage.
7. Restructure the nation's
8. Make growth pay its way
9. Enact campaign finance reform.
10. Determine sustainable population and ecological carrying capacity.

AN END TO GROWTH!

Actions to End Consumption Growth

no more than 2.

to encourage small families.

family planning.

wanted pregnancy.

to encourage efficient usage of wasteful consumption.

with a livable wage.

immigration policy.

and end corporate welfare.

reform.

population and ecological

planning for everyone. (The *Seattle Times* reported recently that a family planning focus in Washington State's welfare program lowered the birth rate to women on public assistance by 30 percent since the program was implemented. Case managers don't tell clients not to have children, they simply provide extensive family planning services and allow clients to make informed decisions about family size.)

- Break the cycle of child sexual abuse.
- Require that health insurance cover family planning

What Businesses Can Do!

- Restructure health insurance rates to reflect the actual costs of larger families.
- Pursue sustainable business practices.
- Pay people a living wage so they can afford housing and health care.

What ideas can you add to this list? One would be to have families—not taxpayers—pay for all the costs of children beyond two, including schools or education! Maybe this is not a popular idea today, but it might be in fifty years when there are 120 million more Americans!

¹ Kerr, Andy. *25 Actions to End Growth in Oregon*. September 2000.

Turn the Tide - Nine Actions for the Planet

Our friends at the Center for the New American Dream recommend these 9 easy things to "turn the tide!"

- 1. Skip a car trip each week**
Prevent emission of 950 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.
- 2. Eat one less beef meal each week**
Save 40,600 gallons of water.
- 3. Don't eat shrimp**
Save 9 pounds of by-catch inadvertently killed each year.
- 4. Cut your junk mail in half**
Save 1/6 of a tree, 70 gallons of water, prevent emission of 46 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.
- 5. Use energy efficient light bulbs**
Prevent emission of 262 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.
- 6. Move the thermostat 3 degrees**
Prevent emission of 360 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.
- 7. Eliminate lawn and garden pesticides**
Prevent 15 ounces of highly toxic chemicals from being released into rivers, streams and groundwater.
- 8. Use low-cost water savings devices**
Save 7800 gallons of water and prevent emission of 460 pounds of carbon dioxide.
- 9. Get two of your friends to become Tide-Turners**
Triple all those numbers!

AGO Out and About

Sept 6: Hosted a reception for AGO at the Oregon Sustainability Forum

Sept 24: Presentation to Columbia Forum, Astoria

Sept 29: Presentation at Oregon Natural Desert Association Conference

Oct 1: Appeared on KGW TV

Oct 2: Article about AGO in *Portland Tribune*

Oct 10: Met with activists in Corvallis about establishing an AGO Chapter

Oct 16: In my opinion piece in *Portland Tribune*

Oct 13: Addressed a question growth forum in Olympia, WA sponsored by the Carnegie Group

Oct 19, 20th: Tabled at Society of Environmental Journalists

Oct 24: Metro Table Talk

Oct 26: Training for education activists with Sierra Club, Facing the Future

Nov: Featured in "Looking for Oregon's Future" Insert into *Oregonian* and other Oregon newspapers by Oregon State University Extension Service

Nov 13: Participated in "Sustainabration"- a celebration of sustainability activists in Portland

Nov 20: Metro Table Talk

BOOK REVIEW

Affluenza - The All-Consuming Epidemic

by John de Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 268 pages, \$24.95. Reviewed by Elizabeth Grossman.

Affluenza was written to put into book form, the material covered in the 1997 television documentary of the same name which chronicled the discontent and distress caused by the American pursuit of more and more stuff. John de Graaf, a documentary filmmaker, David Wann, a writer and former Environmental Protection Agency policy analyst and Thomas Naylor, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Duke University, ground their account of materialism run amok in hard facts but relay it with a light touch.

As they say in their introduction, "There is little in this book that is truly new information, yet the issue in this 'information age' isn't more information. It's how to make sense of what we already know." The aim of the book, they write, is to "encourage a national dialogue about the American consumer dream," so that we may make better, more informed choices about what we buy and what the consequences of those purchases may be - "remembering always, that the best things in life aren't things."

Many readers will be familiar with the premise of *Affluenza*. Some of the facts, however, are well worth noting. Such as that in each of the past four years, more people declared bankruptcy than graduated from college. Or that the nation's CEOs now earn four hundred times as much as the average worker, "a tenfold increase since 1980." Or that although the United States makes up less than five percent of the world's population, we produce

twenty-five percent of the earth's greenhouse gas emissions. And that since 1950, we "have used up more resources than everyone who ever lived on earth before then." Many of us also know that bigger houses, bigger cars, more gadgets and more expensive clothes do not make us more content - despite the advertising's glossy promise.

Yet consumer spending has long been used as an indicator of both the national economy and the country's mood. The more we spend, the better off we are - or so we've been told. This mantra has been particularly insistent in the past year as the great blooming bubble of stock market riches began to deflate, and the Bush administration chose instant gratification as an economic strategy. Since September 11th, national leaders have been telling us with an urgency that takes on a whole new meaning, that consumer confidence, must and will rebound. While confidence - as an indicator of our faith in the future - should return, it's equally clear that the past few decades' rate of consumption is neither tenable nor sustainable.

Affluenza is a first-rate guide to rethinking our patterns of consumption. It reminds us, with many cogent and witty illustrations, why it is so important that we become more considerate consumers and how vital it is to think - and act - for the long rather than short term.

Elizabeth Grossman is co-editor of Shadow Cat - Encountering the American Mountain Lion and author of the forthcoming book, Watershed - The Undamming of America. A version of this review first appeared in Cascadia Times.

Growth Subsidies

Con't from back page

However, surveys show most Oregonians don't want more growth and it's likely that, given the choice, few would opt to subsidize it with their tax dollars. This largely unreported use of public resources represents one of the state's biggest expenditures. And it's occurring at the same time our state and local governments are cutting many of the programs Oregonians do want."

So stay tuned! It is important that we release the findings of this report in such a way that they will have the greatest impact on Oregon's elected officials. However, we will

say that the report will have much to contribute to a discussion at the special session of the Oregon legislature early in 2002 when legislators will need to find \$720 million dollars to cut from Oregon's annual budget. The likely targets are education, prisons, and health care for seniors and disadvantaged citizens.

AGO is working now to set up meetings with Eben and media outlets throughout the state to discuss his report in view of statewide discussions about budget cuts. Perhaps Oregonians will finally realize that it is time to end subsidies to growth!

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AGO Featured in OSU Sustainability Insert

Oregon State University Exention Service recently produced a tabloid on sustainability, "Looking for Oregon's Future: What Is Sustainability?" that features AGO in an article, "Population Growth: A Blessing or a Curse?" We're glad that discussions of sustainability are beginning to include population - an integral aspect that is often ignored by sustainability advocates.

The tabloid is available online at oregonfuture.oregonstate.edu
Or, call 1-800-561-6719 to order a complimentary single copy.

For national population information, check out:

Negative Population Growth
www.npg.org

NumbersUSA
www.numbersusa.org

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Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like.

WILL ROGERS

AGO Anxiously Awaits Release of New Fodor Report

The draft copy of Eben Fodor's report "Assessment of Statewide Growth Subsidies in Oregon" is now in the hands of reviewers and the final report will be out (and on AGO's web page) in January 2002!

Eben had this to say about his report: "Many public officials seem to believe that "growth is inevitable" and therefore any efforts to influence growth would be a waste of time. They typically say we must focus our planning efforts on accommodating more growth, rather than addressing the issue of growth itself. Ironically, many of the same public officials who claim that there is nothing that can be done about growth, are supporting government subsidies to encourage more growth.

Growth subsidies include: free or below-cost infrastructure to serve new development, certain economic development programs and tax incentives aimed at stimulating economic growth, below-cost planning and development services for growth, unmet infrastructure needs, and others.

As our Assessment of Statewide Growth Subsidies nears its conclusion, we are finding that costs of growth subsidization are higher than expected. Very large sums of taxpayers' money are being used to induce urban growth.

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