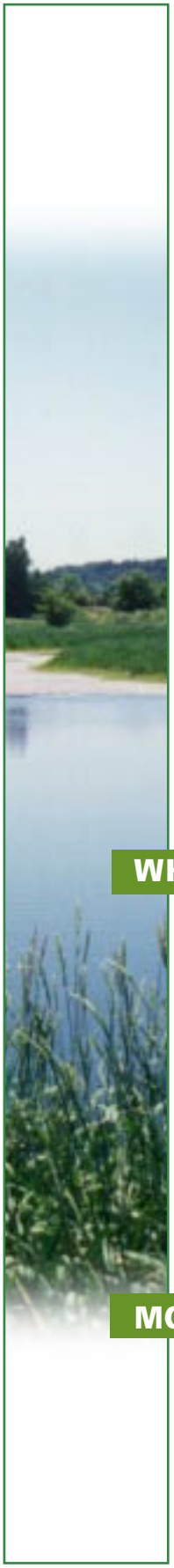
NATURAL RESOURCES



Natural resources include all of nature's assets that we use-which, of course, includes everything! The big issue is how we treat these assets. Resources are extracted in many ways, for example growing food, fishing, mining, forestry, and the pumping of groundwater and oil. The increased use and disposal of products increases the use of natural resources and of energy, and also the environmental problems caused by pollution emissions and the accumulation of waste. It also affects human health through contamination of the atmosphere, soils and waterways. This extraction diminishes resource stocks for humans as well as other species in the future.

Natural resources can either be renewable (such as water or fish which naturally replenish) or non-renewable, like oil where there are limited stocks that can only be replaced over millions of years. While renewable resources can, in theory, be replenished, this is only possible if they are allowed to renew. If use of these resources occurs faster than they can replenish, these assets are depleted or destroyed and can be responsible for removing entire habitats. This is certainly the case with our most basic resources such as land, water and food being affected by pollution and degradation.

Per-capita consumption of natural resources varies hugely around the world. On average, citizens of rich industrialised countries use far larger quantities of resources and produce much more waste than people living in less industrialised countries. However, severe resource depletion occurs in both industrialised countries and nations where the resources have been sourced. It is important to note here that Australia has the second largest ecological footprint in the world, just below the United States. An Ecological Footprint is the area of biologically productive land and water required to support our individual lifestyles. Ecological Footprint analysis can be used to raise our understanding and awareness about the demands we put on the environment to supply our needs and habits.

Every 20 minutes, as 3,500 human lives are brought into the world, we lose at least one entire species of animal or plant life that's 27,000 species per year. This rate of extinction has not been seen in the past 65 million years (Population Connection). With population increase and the continuous rise of natural resource use currently unsustainable, it is up to every household to play a role in creating more environmentally sustainable communities.

Reference: Population Connection, available at www.populationconnection.org/Reports_Publications/Reports/report29.html

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Calculating your Ecological Footprint provides a simple evaluation of the demands that your energy, food, water and forest product consumption has on the environment. Once you calculate your Ecological Footprint, you can set goals to reduce your individual footprint and measure your progress by recalculating it at a later date. A great website for this is at http://www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp
- Considering the environment during all of your current daily activities can reduce your ecological footprint. The best way to do this is to practice the '3Rs' reduce, reuse, recycle check out our 3R's information sheet.
- Reduce consumption by doing more with less. Eliminate non-essential purchases and buy durable, locally produced products with little or no packaging where possible.
- Reuse items as much as you can and donate items that you no longer need (but can be reused by others) to local charities.

MORE INFORMATION

- http://www.landcarensw.org/NSWissues-water.htm - Natural resource issues in NSW.
- http://www.kabq.org.au/eco_footprint/eco_foot_print_calc.htm - Calculate you ecological footprint.
- http://www.newdream.org/ - tips to help you become a more conscious consumer
- http://empowermentinstitute.net - ideas on how to alter over consumption of natural resources in your community