

Mountain Keeping Column 12-7-06

## **What Is Your Eco-Footprint?**

**By Kristan Cockerill**

Imagine five planet Earths. Five times the water. Five times the forests. Five times the mineral wealth. Now think about your lifestyle -- where you live, how you travel, what you eat. Most of us have a pretty comfortable existence. Unfortunately, this comfort has consequences. I, you, our families and our friends all use resources, and this use affects the environment. No one strives to cause environmental damage; rather, it is often a byproduct of our quest for comfort.

One way to better understand the impacts of our choices is to look at our ecological footprint. This is a tool to assess our use of resources (demand) relative to nature's ability to regenerate those resources (supply). The gap between the two is called the "overshoot," and according to a 2006 World Wildlife Fund report, the world's overshoot is 25%, meaning that it takes one year and three months to regenerate what humans use in a single year. The overshoot continues to grow, and if current trends continue, by 2050 demand will be double nature's regeneration rate.

An eco-footprint is reported in "global acres," which represent the area of biologically productive land and water required to supply resources and absorb waste. In other words, a footprint represents what it takes to support a standard of living. The US average eco-footprint is 23.7 global acres per person. Remember our five Earths? Here is the connection: If everyone in the world lived like we do, we would need more than five Earths to supply all of the resources.

The only country with a higher eco-footprint is the United Arab Emirates. The most impoverished countries in the world have average eco-footprints of less than two global acres per person. In the European Union the per person average is about 12 global acres. By comparison our 23.7 global acres per person looks very wasteful.

MountainKeepers and High Country Press have initiated this column to begin a dialogue in the High Country about our individual and community-level impacts on the world around us. Understanding your eco-footprint is a great place to start. Therefore, we ask you to clip this column, respond to the questions, and submit it to MountainKeepers. We will calculate your eco-footprint and in future columns will report on footprint results (anonymously) and will discuss the variables used in an eco-footprint. We will also present ideas for lowering our eco-footprints.

A group of High Country residents established MountainKeepers in 1999. MountainKeepers champions initiatives that help communities work toward sustainability. These Sustainable Communities conserve and protect their natural resources, preserve their unique character and values while fostering a prosperous business climate.