

Careless human environmental destruction



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For many reasons the human race could be called a blessing. Great advanced in technology, medicine and even the fact we are the most sophisticated species on the planet. Are we a gift to planet Earth, or far from it? With cast amounts of pollution and destruction of the planet, not to mention unthinkable acts of violence and hate that has been going on since the beginning of time. Are we really as sophisticated and important as we have led ourselves to believe? Are we any better than any other creature because we are more technologically advanced? Is the human race a blessing?

Humans have destroyed and endangered more species on our planet than any other species or group, with our continuous pollution and lack of respect for our own environment. One area of the world affected by our careless habits is our coastlines and the marine habitats that vast amounts of species rely on. These particular areas of the world are being destroyed because humans don't seem to care as long as they make a couple of dollars in the process. Oil spills like the one in the Prince William Sound on the coast of Alaska and Hawaiian sea turtles and their many troubles with humans are just some examples of human carelessness and the consequences that the environment, particularly marine wildlife incur, which often are fatal.

I chose this particular subject because I find the ocean and its unique and rare inhabitants to be interesting. Every coastline has its one unique species and no two areas are the same. I wanted to learn more about how humans are destroying the habitats of these unique creatures. I found that all species are in some way being threatened by human dominance and carelessness. From the common flounder or sea star you can find when you walk across

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the beach to a rare fish like the coelacanth (prehistoric fish that was believed to be extinct until one was caught off the coast of Madagascar by a local commercial fisherman until in the 1950's). The ocean can be a calm and loving but can easily turn into a vicious killer within seconds. All of these things are what I find so interesting about the ocean. I wanted to find out why people can continue to destroy it even though they know the effect of their actions. I guess some people are ignorant and just don't care if they destroy the things that make our environment so beautiful.

One example of our careless destruction of our environment is the Exxon Valdez oil spill off the coast of Alaska in 1989. The Prince William Sound still shows signs of the oil spill ten years later. Most species have recovered since the spill, but many are still suffering. The Harbor Seal and herring are just two who are vital to the survival of all the species in the area. Herring are the main source of food for many species in the area, including humans. (Mitchell, p. 98) "The ecosystem is gradually recovering from the spill," says Molly McCammon, an Executive director of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, "but it will never be the same as it was twenty years ago." The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council was founded to oversee the use of nine hundred million dollars to the area by the government after settling with the Exxon Company for one billion dollars in criminal and civil damages. One serious problem in the aftermath of Exxon Valdez is the decline of herring. (The table shows the change in populations of Prince William Sound before and after the Exxon Valdez spill.)

Even more disturbing than the fact herring aren't recovering as well as other species like them is the fact they were on the decline before the accident.

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This was a major issue because herring are the center of the ecosystem in the Sound. Many biologists now believe that over fishing of the herring has contributed to their decline. The Pacific Herring is just one species of the area, but if you see how important that one species is to the ecosystem of the Alaskan coast than you begin to see how important all species are to their particular habitats. This is just one example, but if you take a species out of its environment, then a chain reaction would occur, hurting the species around it.

Another species that biologists are beginning to study with the money received from the Exxon Valdez settlement is the Alaskan Salmon. The oil spill has left the Alaskan Salmon on the decline until recently, but still the species is reeling. “ The last two years have been extremely positive for the Alaskan Salmon population,” stated one Alaskan biologist. But her concerns were more focused on the salmon offspring, which had been effected by the spill. Fry, as seen in the left vial, were damaged by the oil. The fry still come in contact with oil when oil pockets seep into some intertidal spawning streams. “ These pockets are like mines,” says Jeffrey Short, a scientist with the National Marine Fisheries Service. Scientist discovered the oil caused genetic defects in salmon. Many species in the Prince William Sound are still recovering from the spill. This is just one spill and you can see the devastation it has made upon its ecosystem. This has been called one of the worst oil spills in history. But you can imagine there has been numerous spills that are almost as areas might never fully recover from the spill on their ecosystem. The devastation of an oil spill is just one of many causes of

marine destruction that humans are guilty of. Many other species suffer from damaged habitats.

Another example of humans destroying their environment and the unique species that live there is Hawaiian Sea turtles. The turtles are becoming endangered because of loss of habitat. The overwhelming presence of humans in the turtle's habitat is making it harder for turtles to find areas where they can lay their eggs. The loss of nesting sites is hurting the reproduction of sea turtles because unpopulated beaches are becoming harder to find. Sea turtles have an affinity for certain beaches and when they cannot lay their eggs there they have to find new areas which can take time. Other reasons why the turtles are being threatened are pollution of the ocean and netting. Pollution in the form of debris is killing turtles. They can ingest the plastic debris and it makes it hard to get the nourishment needed from the food they eat. Netting is another killer of turtles. Fishing nets set out by commercial fishermen are a definite killer of sea turtles in the Hawaiian Islands. (<http://www.turtles.org/marines>). Erosion of beaches also hurts the sea turtle population. The lack of beach forces turtles to lay their eggs in a smaller area. When humans try to stop or reduce erosion it disturbs the turtles even more. Sea walls, canals, jetties, and sandbagging are all things that are used by humans to stop erosion, but they are hurting the turtles more than they are helping them. They need dry land in order to lay their eggs and these structures are reducing land even further.

Fibropapilloma Tumors are a serious threat and are beginning to show up on turtles in Hawaii and other areas with large numbers of sea turtles. They were first seen in turtles around 1930, but it wasn't until 1980 that the

tumors began to show up in epidemic proportions. The green turtles were the only known species to have the tumors, but it has recently been discovered in other turtle species. The most effected areas of the world are Hawaii, Florida, and Australia. (<http://www.turtles.org/threats.htm>)

All of these threats to turtle population are hurting their hopes of survival. But people out to help the sea turtles such as Denise Parker who works with a marine turtle program in Honolulu, Hawaii, have worked hard and the population of marine sea turtles has actually been on the rise in recent years. The turtle's population is coming up from endangered and threatened to a safe number, but that isn't far enough for many who care about the turtles. They continue to help increase the population because they know they would begin to decline again if they didn't have any help. Many groups such as the Marine Turtles Research Program and the National Marine Fisheries Service are helping to restore the turtles in Hawaii. There are also many individuals whose work with the sea turtles have helped in preserving them and their natural environment. One of these people is Ken Nichols. Nichols is a supporter of turtles and he is trying to make the people aware of the environment in the Hawaiian Islands. He feels that the most important thing we can do is conserve the wilderness and beaches from expansion. We need to educate people about the turtles especially children. When asked about how we can save the environment and the habitat of turtles as well as other species Nichols said, " This is obviously a difficult task as the human population continues to grow, which means we are constantly expanding into wild areas which support bio-diversity of all types. I believe the greatest task

is education of children and more efficient use of the existing areas we are using.”

These two ideas, are good examples of how the human race destroys the environment around them. We continue to hurt our wildlife, but there are people out there to fight against the pollution and destruction caused by large corporations and businesses. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 has helped tremendously in the battle for survival of species like the turtles in Hawaii as well as other threatened and endangered species of our planet. (<http://www.fws.gov/r9end.com>). This act prohibits the further destruction or death of the species. By the Endangered Species Act, citizens of the United States are prohibited from taking an endangered or threatened species, declared by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, from its environment whether on United States' soil or in its waters. Punishment if caught breaking the law instead in this act are as follows; 25, 000 dollars if caught violating the rules listed above, 12, 000 for knowingly participating in the importing or exporting of such species. Any person who otherwise violates any provision of this Act, or any regulation, permit, or certificate issued hereunder, may be assessed a civil penalty by the Secretary of not more than \$500 for each such violation. (<http://endangered.fws.gov/esa.html>)

Although this act is a great step towards the restoration of threatened and endangered species many feel the act isn't worth the money. A proposed amendment to the Endangered Species Act threatened many aspects of the project. The proposed “ amendment” was an attempt to undermine the project of funding and political support. The amendment to section 403 of the Endangered Species Act would literally wipe out many of the endangered

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species protected by this bill. “ The sea turtles of Hawaii wouldn’t stand a chance if the amendment would have passed,” said supporters of the Endangered Species Act and endangered species around the world, “ We can’t just let them take back what we have worked so hard for.” Shrimp nets alone kill 55, 000 turtles a year in the Hawaiian Islands. (<http://www.turtles.org/threats>). If the Endangered Species Act is undermined where will these endangered species turn? Some senators who support the amendments to undermine the act are back in congress for a second term and many feel the amendments to the Endangered Species Act will be brought up again and re-voted. (<http://www.turtles.org/threats>). Senator Slade Gorton was one supporter of the bill to undermine the Endangered Species Act.

Are these accusations of inhumanity and lack of care for nature completely true about Senator Gorton? On Senator Gorton’s web site (<http://senate.gov/~gorton>), he shows his compassion for nature. A letter thanking him for his help on saving trees and several streams in his home state of Washington from the Sierra club was one such article bringing up questions of whether he was so bad. Others seem to think otherwise, but it is hard to tell without actually knowing him or all his work.

Many other laws and acts have been implemented to stop the decline in population of many endangered and threatened species. One it the Marine Mammal Act, which protects the many species in our oceans. The Clean Water and Clean Air acts were also adopted to help protect these endangered species from human threats. One example of how humans have hurt many different species of animals is pesticides, especially the pesticide DDT, which was used in World War II to keep insects away from soldiers.

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After the war, the pesticide was brought back to the United States and used very carelessly. DDT seeped into the streams and contaminated almost every species that ate fish or other animals that had been infected with DDT. From the contaminated fish the pesticide went up the food chain and began killing off the bald eagles. After the substance DDT was nationally banned in 1973 the bald eagle has begun to make a comeback like most of the other species affected by our carelessness. (Discovery, “ The Bald Eagle”). Just because the Bald Eagle is the symbol of our country does that mean we have more of an obligation to protect it than the sea turtles?

Hopefully we will be able to stop the amendments one more time, but if they are made what will happen to the animals that depend on it? We have the obligations to protect these animals. We have placed them in this situation and it is our fault many of these species are endangered today. We cannot continue to let them slip away if we can do something about it.

Many organizations are trying to keep these laws in place. Others who feel that our money should go to more worthy causes, even though we personally are responsible for the decline in many species. I think we need to support the laws that are in effect as of right now and try to get better funding for the organizations that are already in place. We don't need new laws, we need to support and help fund the ones we already have. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is one of the big organizations that helps protect the endangered species as well as helping to educate and fund other small organizations that can do their part as well.

It may not be easy to get funding for programs like the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but we can achieve this goal if we work hard. A good example of how we can help to preserve our endangered wildlife is we can implement a tax that will provide money to these programs. We can add a tax to companies who contribute to the destruction of our environment. For example, if a company produces pollution they should be forced to pay a tax. We can place a standard tax for all companies and corporations who do this or we can base the amount owed by the amount of pollution or amount of destruction caused by the corporation on the environment. For companies that we are unable to tell how much exactly contribute to the destruction of the environment, we can require a base sum. A starting base sum could be five hundred dollars a year for all the companies who contribute to the destroying of the Earth. We can assemble a committee of U. S. Fish and Wildlife agents to assess the amount of pollution a company produces and then a fitting cost for that pollution.

It might take a little while to put this proposal into effect. If we anticipated the slow advancement of passing the law in congress it would take six or seven years to implement this law. It wouldn't take a lot of money, but definitely some money would be required. It would take several thousand to advertise if it wasn't donated by a company who felt strongly about the issue at hand. I would think an estimate of about \$500, 00-60, 000 dollars would easily cover the expenses of advertising, salaries for workers and any other expenses. Donations and fundraisers would be used to accumulate enough money to get the support of the people.

When I discussed my proposal with my friend, she felt that it was a good idea and that the organizations like the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service need the money to study and set up programs to save endangered species and these programs need money. She felt it would be hard to get the bill passed because congressmen have ties with big corporations that pollute and they wouldn't have to pay fees. So most likely the proposal would be stopped. Although she didn't see the bill being passed she said that if we accumulate enough money to advertise and get the support of the people, congressmen would be forced to vote for the bill or they might not be reelected. If she has strong feelings about this subject, I'm sure the majority of this society is concerned about the environment and about our future.

We need to try and get funds for programs and organizations that help endangered and threatened species. Many organizations rely on donations and money from supporters. We need to find ways to get more money for these programs and the proposal of taxes on companies who pollute is just one possibility.

Everyone contributes to the destruction of the environment and we all have to do our part to help the species we are killing off. Species like the Pacific Salmon, who were threatened by the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989. As well as other species like the sea turtles in Hawaii who were on the verge of extinction until a recent turn around because of help from organizations and individuals. Individuals who take the burden upon their shoulders and make it their business to make up for all the people who could care less what happens to their environment. We need to protect our environment from the people who seek to destroy it for money and success. I think the beauty of <https://assignbuster.com/careless-human-environmental-destruction/>

the ocean is worth saving. Every creature and every unique species is a creature worth saving. We don't have the right to kill those who aren't as smart or sophisticated as us. They have just as much right to the Earth as we do. We don't have the right to over fish herring in Alaska or cut down all the trees in rain forests just for money and the profit these resources create.