

HOW FOOD WASTE HURTS WILDLIFE

Food waste doesn't just affect the 1 in 7 Americans who go hungry — wasting food also wastes natural resources that native, often endangered wildlife need to survive. In fact, the supersized, meat- and dairy-heavy American diet is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity on the planet. And it's no small matter: Americans waste 40 percent of the food we produce — including all the greenhouse gases, air and water pollution and habitat loss that went into producing that food.

CLIMATE CHANGE

According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, if food waste were a country, it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. The carbon footprint of food waste has grown 300 percent over the past 50 years, contributing to climate change-related threats to countless species, including the American pika and monarch butterfly.¹

WATER

One quarter of the freshwater used in the United States is wasted to produce food that is never eaten.²³ Meanwhile, fresh-water species have decreased by 76 percent in the past 40 years, largely due to habitat loss.⁴

PHOSPHATES

The American diet depends on phosphate fertilizer for nearly all the crops we grow—most of which go to feed livestock. **Phosphate mining** pollutes the planet from the air we breathe to the water we drink and the lands we live on. The wildlife and wild habitats destroyed by phosphate mining are wasted when we produce food that is never eaten.

HABITAT

Agriculture is the greatest threat to biodiversity, in large part because it destroys huge swaths of habitat that wildlife need to survive. It takes nearly **80 million acres of land to produce wasted food** in the United States — an area 35 times the size of Yellowstone.

PESTICIDES

More than **2 billion pounds of pesticides** are sold each year in the United States, severely threatening pollinators like bees — without whom we can't produce food — and damaging water and soil quality. When food is wasted, the pesticides used to grow that food and the harm they caused are also wasted.

BYCATCH

Bycatch is often left out of the food waste conversation, but it takes an enormous toll on marine life and ocean health. Fishing longlines are more than 60 miles long, with thousands of hooks that catch massive amounts of unintended targets or “bycatch.” This includes 100 million sharks, tens of thousands of sea turtles, seabirds, whales and other marine life.

MEAT AND DAIRY

Wasting meat and dairy products come with a massive cost to the environment. The production of meat and dairy pollutes more than 35,000 miles of rivers in 22 states, contaminates groundwater in 17 states, and impairs wetlands and estuaries.¹⁰ Meat and dairy production also contribute to **air pollution**, from methane to nitrous oxide, in the 500 million tons of manure livestock produce per year.¹⁰ As a result, when meat and dairy products are thrown away, there's an incredible amount of wasted resources being thrown away with them.

LANDFILLS

Uneaten food is the **single largest source of trash** in municipal landfills,⁵ attracting wildlife and providing an unnatural food source for certain species.^{6,7} Increasing raven populations, strengthened by abundant food waste, have contributed to the decline of such species as marbled murrelets, sandhill cranes and snowy plovers, among others.⁸ In addition, landfills are the third largest U.S. source of methane (a potent greenhouse gas).⁹

DON'T WASTE WILDLIFE

By wasting less food, we can take a meaningful step to protect wildlife and the environment. Visit DontWasteWildlife.com to join the Beat Food Waste Challenge, and find out how you can take action to reduce your food waste and demand food producers and suppliers do so, too.

References

1. FAO, 2013. Food wastage footprint: Impacts on natural resources. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3347e/i3347e.pdf>.
2. <http://www.takeextinctionoffyourplate.com/waste>
3. <http://www.worldwildlife.org/initiatives/fresh-water>
4. http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/living_planet_report_2014.pdf
5. USDA. "Frequently Asked Questions- Food Waste." <http://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm>
6. http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/air/landfill_gas.htm
7. <http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/251171-obama-seeks-new-air-pollution-limits-for-landfills>
8. Conniff, Richard. "Unnatural Balance: How Food Waste Impacts World's Wildlife." Yale Environment 360.
9. http://www.takeextinctionoffyourplate.com/meat_and_wildlife.html
10. <http://www.ewg.org/meateatersguide/interactive-graphic/pesticides>

