

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

The Izaak Walton League believes that sustainability forms the foundation of our work. It is about both preserving our natural resource heritage and nurturing people's appreciation for the outdoors.

The word and concept of sustainability is not new. The term "sustainable development" was first used widely after a 1972 United Nations meeting about the human environment in Stockholm, Sweden. In 1987, the U.N. World Commission on Environment and Development issued the first concise definition of sustainable development: development that "meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The report that contained the definition, called the Bruntland report, provided a framework for governments to meet the needs of an expanding world population. The framework included three key concepts:

- A high value must be placed on natural resources, biological diversity, and the value produced by functioning ecosystems, such as cleaning water and air.
- People must discover and exchange information about new technologies that provide more jobs, improve the use of renewable natural resources, and increase food production.
- Equality and justice must be promoted among all people and between generations to alleviate poverty, reduce violence, and build better communities.

Definitions of sustainability have evolved since the first attempts to describe it. Today, we think of sustainability as a three-legged-stool. Each leg represents economic, environmental,

and social, or human capital, and each leg needs the others to maintain balance.

Economic capital encompasses everything we need to produce, deliver, and consume goods and services. This includes tools and technologies that turn resources into products, our money and financial systems, and transportation and communication infrastructures.

Environmental capital consists of the Earth's natural resources: soil, air, wood, water, plants, and wildlife. It also includes the services that living systems provide, such as plants turning carbon dioxide into oxygen, wetlands absorbing flood water, and soil filtering our water.

Social capital includes the vast resources and potential of each individual and of our collective institutions. Think of our knowledge, our education and health care systems, and the many ways we govern and make decisions. Social capital also includes recreation, politics, religion, and cultural traditions.

Describing these things as capital helps to see that each can be increased or decreased, built up or spent out, depending on how we choose to act. Often we think of the economy, social needs, and environment as competing. "You can't stop progress — those trees have to come down." The economy usually comes out on top, but sustainability looks to balance the different types of capital. In fact, it looks beyond balancing to building up economic, environmental, and social capital together.



Izaak Walton League of America

Population: The Hidden Driver

When it comes to affecting natural resources, most of us think about consumption first. Energy efficiency, water quality, and recycling receive much attention. However, the number of people and how fast that number is growing is just as important. More people require more services, consume more resources, and produce more waste, placing greater demands on land, water, schools, roads, wildlife habitat and utilities.

While not every community faces significant population growth in the near future, overall, national and world populations continue to increase. This growth will present a significant challenge to sustainability, placing ever-greater demands on finite resources. The good news is that there are policies and tools available to help balance population growth with the limits of nature. Educating girls and women, and increasing access to health care and voluntary family planning have already helped to slow population growth worldwide.



Piecing together a sustainable future is not an easy task. If we could magically freeze our population at the current level of nearly 7 billion people, we would still have to radically transform our land, water and natural resources use. But if we suddenly reduced our consumption by half tomorrow, and yet continued to grow our population at today's rate, we would double our numbers

in about 40 years, canceling out the consumption gains. It's not an either or proposition. Slowing the growth of population AND consumption are essential to sustainability.

Some Population and Sustainability Facts:

- Today a little over 1 billion people lack access to safe water. According to conservative estimates, that number will at least double by 2050.
- Human activity has cleared about half of the world's original forest cover and we lose an additional 18 million acres of forests per year along with 14 million acres that are degraded.
- More than 1.7 billion women worldwide are between the ages of 15 and 49. Investing in their education, reproductive health, economic opportunity and political rights can spur sustainable development and ease population pressures.
- The U.S. has supported international family planning programs for 40 years. Since then, fertility has dropped from 6, to just over 2.5 children per woman. Yet, since 1995, funding has fallen by more than 30% while the population has grown by 800 million people.

Different Definitions of Sustainability

* Sustainability is the commonsense notion that long-term prosperity and ecological health not only go together, they depend on one another. (Izaak Walton League of America)

* A thriving population in a livable world. (Population Action International)

* Sustainability's underlying principals are clear. Leave our grandchildren a world that allows them a quality of life at least as good as ours. Don't use renewable resources faster than they can renew themselves. Look for ways to replace nonrenewables with renewable ones. Don't achieve your sustainability at someone else's expense. (Jon Rouch, former president of the Wilderness Society)