The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russians Consuming Faster Than Earth Can Supply

By Roland Oliphant

May 16, 2012



Russia's ecological footprint is generally in line with the European average, WWF's Living Planet report found. **Vladimir Filonov**

If everyone lived like Russians, humanity would need 2 1/2 planet Earths to sustain consumption, though this profligacy is dwarfed by the American lifestyle — which would require no less than four planets to sustain on a humanity-wide scale, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

WWF's Living Planet report was released Tuesday, ahead of the UN's Rio +20 summit on sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June.

It warns that the world is currently consuming resources 50 percent faster than they can be replaced — and that figure is rising.

The biannual report, produced in association with the Zoological Society of London and the

Global Footprint Network, ranked countries on two indexes: their "ecological footprint" — how much natural resources people use to supply their renewable resources, meaning everything from animals and plants farmed or hunted for food, to trees that absorb CO2 emissions or are used in building; and "bio capacity" — the area of such land and water that the country has.

The report is part of a push to include environmental health in calculations of economic growth in order to incentivize governments to "do more with less."

Russia was the 33rd "least rational" consumer, according to the report, needing about 4 1/2 "Earth hectares" of biologically productive land per person per year, the report found. That is generally in line with the EU average of 4.72 hectares per capita.

Most of the Russian footprint (58 percent) comes from land and sea areas needed to absorb its vast carbon emissions, followed by crop raising and forestry. The rest comes from areas used for grazing animals, fishing and building.

Experts said the greatest potential for reducing the country's footprint lies in energy efficiency. "Energy saving in buildings is the largest reserve for Russia to reduce CO2 emissions," WWF director Igor Chestin said.

The least sustainable lifestyles are found in Qatar, whose residents have a footprint of nearly 12 hectares each, also mostly accounted for by intensive carbon emissions.

The global average was 2.7 hectares per person in 2008. At current rates of consumption, it takes the Earth 1 1/2 years to regenerate the renewable resources that humanity uses in a single year.

And the report predicts that by 2030 we would need the equivalent of two planet Earths to balance our annual consumption of biological resources.

In a bit of good news, Russia is the fourth-largest reserve of bio capacity — its vast for 7.9 percent of the world's total bio capacity, behind only Brazil, China and the United States — and is 18th in terms of bio resources per capita, making it comparatively "rich" in terms of biological wealth.

Worldwide, the picture is less positive. The research reveals an alarming 30 percent global decline since 1970 in the health of species and biodiversity — seriously threatening the ability of ecosystems to provide the services humans rely on.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/05/16/russians-consuming-faster-than-earth-can-supply-a14807