

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
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## The Importance of Earth Overshoot Day

There is no question that the environment on planet Earth is deteriorating. And there is no question that we must do something about it. This month of August is wrapped between two important dates at the beginning of the month and at the end of the month. It has been mentioned many times that the quantity and quality of water serving the people on planet Earth is decreasing and could very well be the most critical environmental issue we are facing globally. Another critical issue is climate change which is responsible for many recent catastrophes. A third major environmental issue is the over consumption of our natural resources. These are the earth's resources necessary for food, clothing, shelter, energy, and anything else needed for life on the planet. Unfortunately, we are consuming these resources faster than the earth can regenerate them.

An organization called the Global Footprint Network (GFN) has been measuring the generation and consumption of the natural resources by each country on the planet. The measurement is in terms of the amount of productive land and sea area *available* for each country as well as the amount of productive land and sea area *consumed* by each country. The GFN (<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/>) makes these calculations for each country as well as for the entire planet. Based on these calculations, a determination is made when the world will consume all the natural resources generated in that calendar year. For 2018, the GFN noted that date to be August 1, 2018 and is called Earth Overshoot Day because that is when we started consuming more natural resources than will be generated this year. Basically, we are consuming the equivalent of 1.7 earths.

In 2017 Earth Overshoot Day was on August 2 while in 2016 it was on August 8. So the trend is that this day is getting earlier and earlier each year. What can we do to reverse this trend? Reduce deforestation is one action. Advance the circular economy by reducing 55% of the waste in the U.S. that goes to landfills while in many E.U. countries it is only 5%. Reduce the amount of food waste which is currently about 40% of production in the U.S. There are many things that can be done but it requires educating the people so they are aware of the situation and the impending consequences.

So that brings me to the other end of the month of August. Since 1989, the Greek Orthodox Church has proclaimed September 1 as the annual day of prayer for the Care of Creation. In 2015, the Roman Catholic Church followed this tradition, and it also proclaimed September 1 as the day of prayer following the issuance of Pope Francis' encyclical on protecting Our Common Home called *Laudato Si*. As the ecclesiastical day actually starts the evening before at 6 PM, people around the world will be praying for the environment the evening of August 31. This message of praying for the environment goes out to the 1.2 billion Roman Catholic and 300 million Eastern Orthodox Christians

in the world. This practice is not restricted and should be practiced by everyone on this planet that cares about the environment. So we have August 1 as this year's Earth Overshoot Day, and we have August 31 to pray for the Care of Creation. But is this enough?

The most important action item for the protection of the environment is to educate everyone as to the importance of protecting the environment. We must reverse the trend of Earth Overshoot Day and make it longer and longer so we can get it back to December 31. This would then mean that we are no longer consuming more natural resources than we are generating. Only then can the earth provide indefinitely for our growing population. Obviously, it is not just the individual citizens that must take this action, but also corporations, governments, and all other organizations. Let's start to see if we can move Earth Overshoot Day later in 2019.