



Five Ways Humans Made The Earth Way Better Since The First Earth Day

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It's Earth Day again, and inevitably we are going to be bombarded with ways human activities are causing some sort of impending disaster.

But we here at The Daily Caller News Foundation are optimists and want to show you the ways humans have actually made the planet better.

Yes, mankind can damage the environment, but we can also make the planet a much better, and greener, place to live — especially as more countries adopt free markets and property rights.

So, without further ado, here are five ways humans have improved the environment since the first Earth Day in April 1970.

1. Carbon Dioxide Is 'Greening' The World

While carbon dioxide emissions may be warming the planet (the degree to which is hotly debated), increased emissions have also been a boon for plant life in the past few decades.

How in the world does this happen? Think of it like a greenhouse: the more CO₂, the better it is for plants. CO₂ is plant food. This phenomenon is best summarized by a [study](#) by the libertarian Cato Institute which found that “concurrently with the increased CO₂ levels, extensive, large, and continuing increase in biomass is taking place globally — reducing deserts, turning grasslands to savannas, savannas to forests, and expanding existing forests.”

2. We've Saved The Whales And The Polar Bears

Once widely hunted, humpback whales and polar bears are thriving despite threats from global warming.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently [recommended](#) taking certain humpback whale populations off the Endangered Species list because legal protections and “restoration efforts over the past 40 years have led to an increase in numbers and growth rates for humpback whales in many areas.”

Similarly, there are more polar bears today than there were 40 years ago, largely thanks to international efforts to ban hunting and trading. The polar bear is listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act because of future threats from global warming, but today bear populations are healthy and [doing just fine](#).

3. Forests Are Growing

Jesse Ausubel, director of the Program for the Human Environment at Rockefeller University in New York, has found that many countries are in a “forest transition,” meaning forest area is increasing and not decreasing.

Since 1830, France has seen its forest area grow all while its population has doubled. Same thing goes for the U.S. starting in 1950. Why is this happening? Tree plantations.

“In recent times,” Ausubel [said](#). “About a third of wood production comes from plantations. If that were to increase to 75 percent, the logged area of natural forests could drop in half.”

4. Hunting Is Actually Saving Rhinos And Elephants

For decades African governments have struggled to curtail poaching of endangered species, like elephants and rhinos. While poaching is still a problem, some countries have solved the issue by giving tribes property rights over animals. This means local tribes are allowed to regulate hunting on their own lands.

Free-market environmentalists with the Property and Environment Research Center [note](#) that in “1900, the southern white rhinoceros was the most endangered of the world’s five rhinoceros species.” But allowing for hunting and establishing clear property rights meant that by 2010 “white rhino numbers had climbed to more than 20,000, making it the most common rhino species on the planet.”

The model has been widely successful. So much so, that ranchers in Texas [started breeding](#) African antelopes for hunting in a move to save the species from dying off.

5. The Air Is Way Cleaner Than It Used To Be

Remember acid rain and smog alerts? Maybe not, but that’s because U.S. air quality has drastically improved since the first Earth Day. Since 1980, the EPA [says](#) air pollutants have fallen 62 percent all while industry has grown and more cars have been put on the road.

The air is cleaner, in part, because of the EPA, but it's also because market economies are constantly looking at ways to more efficiently use resources and reduce waste. There's a natural incentive for industry to become cleaner.