



Immigration numbers – a response to Hiding

It is refreshing to see the interconnections of immigration and environmental issues addressed in an ESA publication (*Front Ecol Environ* 2009; **7**[7]: 350–51). Foreign immigration has been the major driver of US population growth for a few decades, as Hiding notes in her letter. And it is also the major driver of US environmental degradation that is most amenable to quick reduction – or quick increase. Post-2000 immigrants and their descendants are estimated to account for 62% of the 12.2 million people added to the US population between 2000 and 2004 (Lee *et al.* 2005). If current trends continue, the US population is projected to increase to 438 million by 2050, and 82% of that increase will be due to post-2005 immigrants and their descendants (Passel and Cohn 2008). But the US Congress, the White House, and the growth *über alles* political, religious, and commercial establishments are not satisfied with “current trends”. They want to increase immigration rates. According to Martin and Fogel (2006), if Congress enacts “comprehensive immigration reform” of the sort the US Senate passed in 2006 (Senate Bill 2611), then the US population is projected to reach over 500 million by 2050, with nearly 100% of the projected increase attributable to post-2006 immigrants and their descendants.

Three statements in Hiding’s essay merit comment. First, citing Meyerson (2004), Hiding states that US “fertil-

ity rates hover consistently around replacement”. What Meyerson showed is that US fertility rates dropped from about 3.7 children per woman in the mid-1950s to a below-replacement level of 1.7 by 1975 and then rose to 2.0 by 2002. By 2007 it was 2.1. That 24% increase in US fertility rate since the 1970s coincided with a large influx of immigrants from cultures favoring large families. That total fertility rate is operating synergistically with high immigration rates to postpone US population stabilization indefinitely.

Second, Hiding says that, “Ecology can help distinguish impacts of immigration on biodiversity, but it cannot provide the answers regarding what to do”. I believe that ecologists not only can “provide the answers” but also have a moral obligation to do so. Whether decision makers will accept our advice is a different matter; they certainly have no obligation to accept it blindly. But if we do not present sound advice, strongly and clearly, who else will give better advice on such matters? Is it not irresponsible to abandon the field to the anti-environmental, pro-growth establishments? They will not mimic our timidity. As professional ecologists, we should be no more shy about presenting advice on all aspects of US population policy than we have been about offering guidance on forest management, pesticide use, industrial pollution, the draining of wetlands, and the hunting of whales.

Third, quoting blogger Stephen Holder, Hiding says, “...illegal immigration degrades the environment; enforcing the border against illegal immigration degrades the envi-

ronment. Glad that’s clear”. This statement conveys the impression that it’s “six of one, half a dozen of the other”. Yet the US population is already larger by many tens of millions of people as a result of just post-1970 *illegal* immigrants and their descendants – certainly more people, for example, than the combined populations of Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, New York, and Miami. And illegal immigration into the US continues on a massive scale. To imply that there is even an approximate equivalence between the environmental damage done by such large increments in the US population and the localized environmental damage done by border fences and patrols along them is very misleading.

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