

HUMAN IMPACTS by the numbers

Griffin Chure¹, Avi Flamholz², Nicholas S. Sarai³, Tine Valencic¹, Yinon Bar-On⁴, Ron Milo⁴, Rob Phillips^{2,5,*}

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA, USA, 91125:

¹Department of Applied Physics; ²Division of Biology and Biological Engineering; ³Division of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering; ⁴Department of Physics

⁵Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot 7610001, Israel:

Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences

ABSTRACT

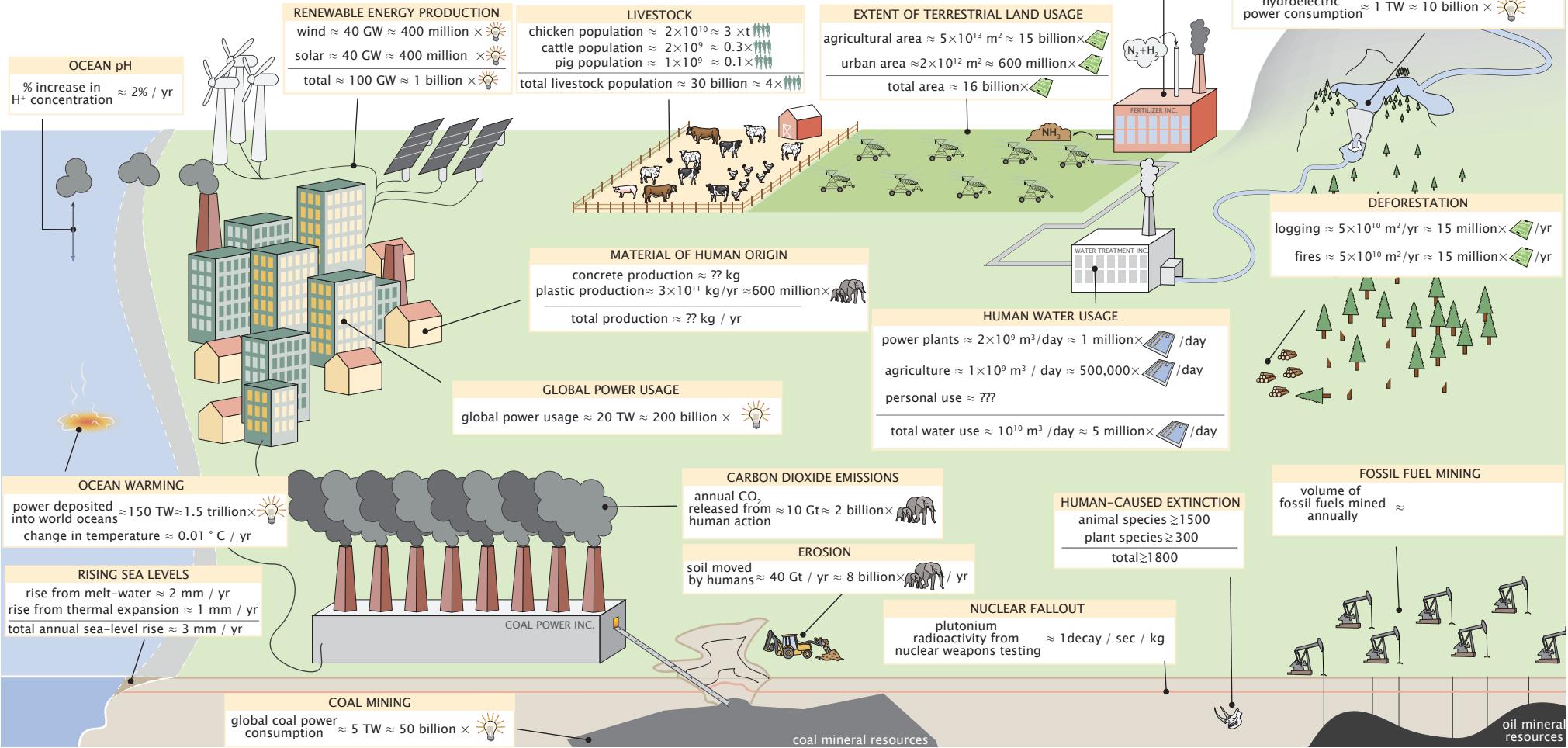
The greatest experiment of the last 10,000 years is the presence and action of modern human beings on planet Earth. At this point, the consequences of this experiment are being felt on many fronts. Yet, many people still hold the view that because the world is so "huge", humans cannot really make a substantial impact. One way to organize our thinking about what these impacts might be, with tongue in cheek, is to focus on Empedocles's classic elements, earth, air, water and fire, with the idea being to explore how humans have altered the land and its inhabitants, the atmosphere, the oceans and how our quest for cheaper and cheaper energy (fire) from the world around us has altered that world. This snapshot represents a small collection of numbers that summarize the broad reach of human action across the planet, presenting a view of the impact of human presence on Earth.

UNITS OF REFERENCE

human population	=	≈ 7×10 ⁹	mass of an elephant	=	≈ 5000 kg
area of soccer pitch	=	≈ 3000 m ²	power of a lightbulb	=	≈ 100 W
volume of olympic pool	=	≈ 2000 m ³			

MELT WATER

glacial melt volume	≈ 3×10 ¹¹ m ³ /yr	≈ 150 million	×	≈ 150 million
ice-sheet melt volume	≈ 5×10 ¹¹ m ³ /yr	≈ 250 million	×	≈ 250 million
total melt volume	≈ 10 ¹² m ³ /yr	≈ 5000 million	×	≈ 5000 million



HUMAN IMPACTS by the magnitudes

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THE ANTHROPOCENE

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THE MAGNITUDE OF HUMAN WATER USAGE

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HUMANS AS THE EARTH'S GREATEST EVOLUTIONARY FORCE

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HUMAN IMPACTS ON ATMOSPHERIC AND BIOGEOCHEMICAL CYCLES

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THE MAGNITUDE OF HUMAN ENERGY USAGE

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