

# What Can I Do To Make A Difference ?

As with Most environmental issues, the question many rightfully ask is “What can I do to make a difference?” This is, in fact, the No. 1 question we must all answer as we attempt to solve the most complex slate of environmental problems humanity has ever faced.

A good place to start on your own journey to answering this question is to recognize that each of us inhabits many worlds, two of which are very influential in this context. There is the physical world in which we live, where we have varying degrees of influence over nature and natural processes, and there’s the financial world that both constrains and supports so many aspects of our lives. For those of us who own a piece of nature – everything from small backyards to large forest tracts – we should strive to properly steward these spaces for the benefit of wildlife and, ultimately ourselves.

We each should also take part in efforts to conserve and restore our shared physical world. These remaining natural places, held in common that many of us feel connected to, must remain a vibrant part of the biosphere that provides ecological services to us all, even when services may not be easily recognized by the casual observer, such as the ability of intact wetlands to improve water quality by filtering sediments and absorbing pollutants; and in the specific case of salt marshes, protecting costal communities from flooding, erosion and property damage during major storms; and the air filtration, carbon sequestration, and cooling services provided by forests just to name a few.

For many of us however, the greatest power to influence positive environmental change on a daily basis lies in the financial world. As citizens of a First World nation, the tentacles of our financial lives literally reach across the globe each time we decide to purchase- or not to purchase-a product or service, so we must remember that everything we buy is either taken from or grown upon the Earth, and all that is produced affects the health of the Earth and of each of us, often in ways that are not readily apparent. As consumers, we must all make a conscious effort to use the available information to make the most informed purchase decisions possible with nature in mind. And while the efforts of one may seem insignificant, even small, incremental changes can have a substantial collective effect when you consider there are 8.1 billion of us.

Finally we must each accept responsibility for our role in preserving and restoring our planet for generations, because no edicts from a government will amount to real change without the heartfelt commitment of its citizens. The young will inherit the sum of our decisions, so we should enlist their help in imagining and engineering a more sustainable way of life as soon as possible.

# Where We Make Our Stand

There is a lot of talk, planning, and social scientific focus of late on the potential for humanity to visit and inhabit other worlds. Chiefly, human spaceflight back to the lunar surface and to Mars are commanding much of the conversation. The desolation of the Moon is stark and the equally life-less Mars has an atmosphere comprised of 95% CO<sub>2</sub> with surface temperatures of minus 80 degrees Fahrenheit at its poles during winter. Attempting to inhabit either place would relegate colonists to a prison-like existence, sealed off from their surroundings in manufactured and biologically bankrupt environments. A spoonful of Earth's living soil is far more biologically complex than any environment we could create and sustain inside a human-friendly enclosure on the surface of another world.

The discovery of exoplanets located in the “habitable zones” of other star systems has grabbed headlines. These are places where liquid water could exist on a planet's surface, so long as atmospheric conditions and other factors allow it. One such exoplanet, Proxima Centauri b, which orbits our closest neighboring star, Proxima Centauri, is 4.2 light years away, or about 25 million miles from Earth. If we traveled there, at the speed of our fastest-ever spacecraft, the Parker Solar Probe, which boasts a top speed of 430,000 mph it would take us over 6,600 years to reach it.

Dr. Sagan said it best 30 years ago when he wrote in the *Pale Blue Dot*,

*“The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.”*

Text taken from the November 2024 edition of Massachusetts Wildlife magazine. Author Troy Gipps, editor and art director of Massachusetts Wildlife.

# Facts About Paper Consumption

One trait all papertarians have in common is a deep love of forests. Whether we show it by camping among the trees or just gazing at them through our windows, we want to take care of them. And that's exactly what papertarians do. Every time you reach for paper packaging at the drugstore, you're contributing to cleaner water and air. Every time you buy a paper day planner instead of just doing everything digitally, you're helping build more robust wildlife habitats. And every time you use paper food containers for leftovers, you're supporting the kind of replanting that sees the forestry industry grow nearly twice the tree volume that it harvests every year.

That's all because paper is one of the few truly sustainable materials in the United States. Most paper is made from the wood pulp found in trees. Paper producers work with private landowners to continually source, plant and grow trees—a big reason why there are 20% more trees in the US today than there were in 1970. That creates a direct connection between your choices, private landowners and a healthier planet. When there's a continual demand for paper and paper-based packaging—from notebooks to print magazines and milk cartons—those landowners have a strong incentive to keep doing what they're doing rather than deforesting land for other types of development.

**Of the 766 million acres of U.S. forests, only 2% of trees are harvested each year. That's less than the amount of affected naturally by disease, insect damage and fire.**

So if you've ever worried about paper and cardboard boxes destroying forests, remember that your boxes and books actually help sustain them. The U.S. has about 766 million acres of forests, and trees are cut and removed from only about 2% of them each year—less than the amount affected naturally by disease, insect damage and fire.

Sustainable forestry practices, meanwhile, help keep woodlands healthy and flourishing so that they can store carbon, slow climate change, and improve soil and water quality. At the same time, they provide a bounty of habitats for wildlife from wild turkeys and foxes to quail, tree frogs and rabbits.

What does that mean for you? Ultimately, trees—an infinitely renewable resource—are good for the planet and good for you. Which is why going papertarian is the smart choice.

From [paperandpackaging.org](http://paperandpackaging.org)

# Ten Simple Things You Can Do to Help Protect the Earth

- Reduce, reuse, and recycle. Cut down on what you throw away. ...
  - Volunteer! Volunteer for cleanups in your community. ...
    - Educate. ...
    - Conserve water. ...
    - Choose sustainable. ...
      - Shop wisely. ...
    - Use long-lasting light bulbs. ...
      - Plant a tree
  - Don't send chemicals into our waterways
    - Bike more, drive less

# PROTECTING OUR PLANET STARTS WITH YOU



## BIKE MORE DRIVE LESS



reduce  
**REUSE**  
recycle

Cut down on what you throw away. Follow the three "R's" to conserve natural resources and landfill space.

## choose sustainable



Learn how to make smart seafood choices at [www.FishWatch.gov](http://www.FishWatch.gov).

Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change.



**PLANT  
A TREE**



## EDUCATE

When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources.

## CONSERVE WATER



The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually end up in the ocean.



Buy less plastic and bring a reusable shopping bag.



**Don't send  
chemicals  
into our  
waterways.**

Choose nontoxic chemicals in the home and office.



## Volunteer!

Volunteer for cleanups in your community. You can get involved in protecting your watershed too!



Long-lasting  
light bulbs  
- ARE A -  
**BRIGHT  
IDEA**

Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room!

