

## Growth is not inevitable

Imagine an airplane that took off without someone weighing the load, bothering to check the fuel gauges, or having navigation systems. Is this the plane we are on?

A major assumption of the Mendocino County plan is that population “growth is inevitable.” John Sherman of Brooktrails makes the same assumption in his letter “We must prepare for growth.” Since everyone alive today has lived during a growth period, this is the predominant view in our society. I know this sounds preposterous, but I believe growth will end soon.

Lest people believe that I am uninformed on this topic, my doctorate is literally in “population biology.” The population models used by government agencies, called “life tables,” are extrapolations from past trends on fertility, mortality and migration patterns. These models can accurately predict an expanding population if adequate food, water, health care, energy, and housing supplies are available. However, the life tables used by the government don’t incorporate any of these factors. Take away just one of these elements and growth ends. For example, we learned at the meeting that Mendocino County has little clue about its own resource base, including water. To plan for growth without a resource inventory is grossly irresponsible. Is the plane going to stay in the air?

I have studied data and population models that do incorporate environmental factors into their projections. It isn’t pretty. The large crowd at the planning meeting can be attributed to the activities of Willits Economic Localization, which is working to understand these issues and guide us, via sound planning, to create a more secure and healthy town. But planners need to get real. If they don’t, it is difficult to imagine, and much worse to accept, but I fear we are heading for a crash landing.

Note to editors. I have written on these topics before, e.g.

<http://www.energybulletin.net/3788.html>

<http://www.energybulletin.net/3179.html>