



The *ecological footprint* is a way of measuring our impact on the natural environment. It uses daily human activity to calculate, in a general way, how much productive land and water would be required to support our current way of life.

Research tells us that there are only about 1.8 hectares of productive land and water space to support the life of each person on the Earth if we all shared equally.

However, the average Canadian uses much more than this, while people in less-developed nations often use much less. This means that Canadians, and all members of the more-developed nations of the world, need to carefully examine their personal impact on the natural environment.

Citizens, groups, and nations can calculate their ecological footprints using different formulas, some of which are more complicated than others. However, all calculations of ecological footprints include the following elements:

- ✓ food and water consumption
- ✓ waste production
- ✓ housing
- ✓ transportation
- ✓ energy consumption
- ✓ consumption of products (goods) and services



When scientists determine the ecological footprint per capita (per person) of any given country, they often compare it to the biological capacity of that country, which is the amount of available land and water space capable of sustaining life in that country.

Some countries have a large supply of productive space. Canada, for example, has large surfaces of arable land, natural resources, and fresh water, and therefore has a large biological capacity.

When a country's ecological footprint is higher than its biological capacity, it has an *ecological deficit*. This means that it cannot sustain the current lifestyle without help from other countries.

EcoVoyageurs, What is the Ecological Footprint?:

<[www.ecovoyageurs.com/EcoSite%20English/EcoFoot/whatisef.htm](http://www.ecovoyageurs.com/EcoSite%20English/EcoFoot/whatisef.htm)>

Earthday Network, Redefining Progress, Ecological Footprint Quiz:

<[www.myfootprint.org/](http://www.myfootprint.org/)>

Ranking the Ecological Footprint of Nations (1997):

<[www.ecouncil.ac.cr/rio/focus/report/english/footprint/ranking.htm](http://www.ecouncil.ac.cr/rio/focus/report/english/footprint/ranking.htm)>

Redefining Progress, Sustainability Issue Brief, Ecological Footprint of Nations (November 2002):

<[www.redefiningprogress.org/publications/ef1999.pdf](http://www.redefiningprogress.org/publications/ef1999.pdf)>