

**Jonathan Schechter – “Corpus Callosum” Column
Jackson Hole News&Guide – December 2, 2009**

“If you have money to invest, there is no safer haven than something rare.”

– Laurence Graff, the self-styled “King of Diamonds,” as quoted in the *Economist*, November 21, 2009, in an article entitled: “Colour Me Dazzled: Record Auction Prices for Rare Coloured Diamonds.”

“I don’t think anyone thinks about it anymore,” said Julie Johnson. “Our little bit of saving and the next people’s bit of saving can make a big difference. Power to the people.”

– Excerpt from a November 24, 2009 *Los Angeles Times* article about successful strict water rationing regulations imposed in Brisbane, Australia, in response to the worst drought on record.

As always, it boils down to supply and demand.

During the last 2000 years, the world’s population has grown in a “hockey stick” pattern. When Christ was born, there were approximately 350 million people in the world, roughly the population of America today. By 1800 – around the birth of both the Industrial Revolution and the United States – earth’s population was about a billion. Do the math and, during the previous eighteen hundred years, population increased an average of seven percent per century.

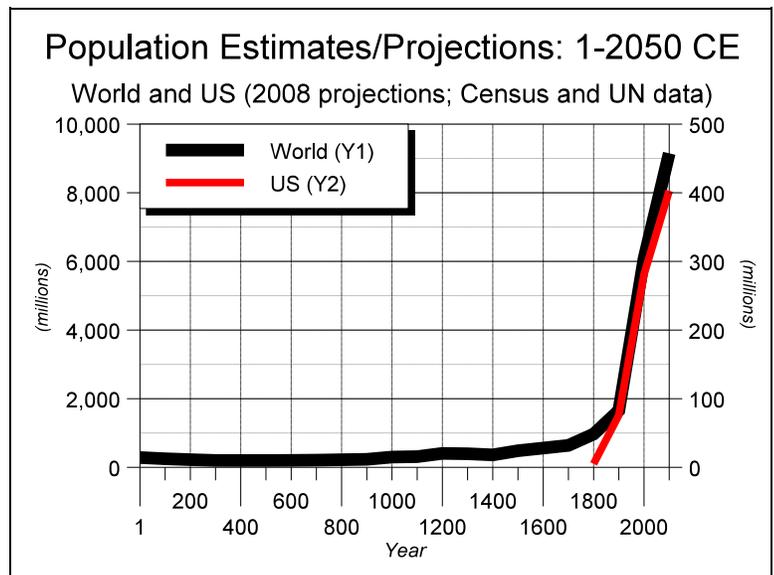
The technological advances of the Industrial Revolution allowed the world’s population to explode, and it did. During the 19th century, the world’s population increased by half a billion people, eight times faster than during the previous eighteen centuries.

From a demographic perspective, this was just a warmup. Between 1900-2000, the world’s population quadrupled, reaching six billion. Growing fifteen percent per decade, during the 20th century the world added as many people every 30 years as it had during the previous 1900 years combined.

By 2050, we’ll add another three billion people, taking total population to over nine billion. How to think about this? When someone 29 years old today was born, the world’s population was 4.5 billion. 41 years from now, when she turns 70, the world’s population will be twice as large as when she was born.

As Graph 1 shows, the United States is on a similar trajectory. As a result, between 2000 and 2050, America will add as many people as currently live in the eleven western states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Plus Alaska and Hawaii. Plus the five Great Plains states of Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Texas. Plus the six states on the western bank of the Mississippi: Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Missouri.

In other words, during the first half of the 21st century, America will add as many people as currently live west of the Mississippi. They’re all going to have to live somewhere, yet we



Graph 1

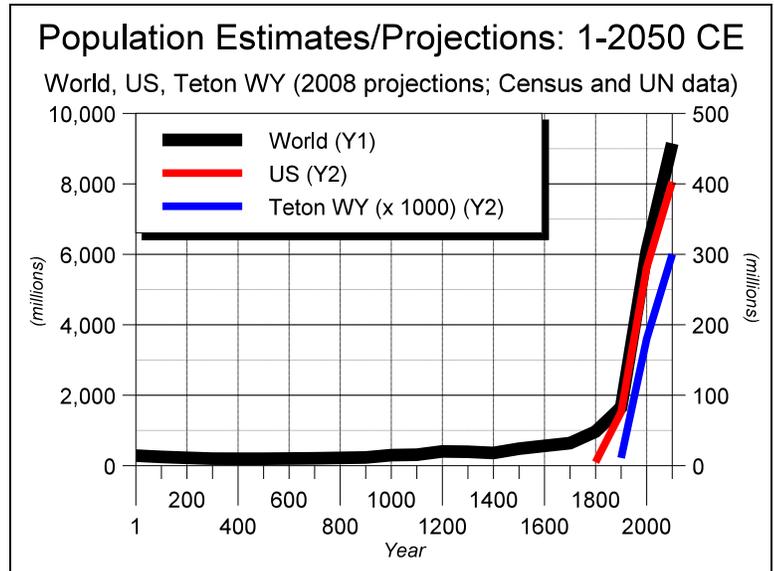
aren't building any more land. Hence supply and demand.

Enabling all this growth has been technology. Unfortunately, while we're really good at inventing things, we're not very good at dealing with their consequences. As a result, only willful dis-believers can look at phenomena such as collapsing fisheries or global warming and not wonder if humans' ability to grow is outstripping earth's ability to support that growth.

So what? What does this have to do with Jackson Hole?

Just this. Since 1900, Teton County has been growing at the same rate – in fact, even faster -- than our hockey stick nation and world. We started later, but we're on the same trajectory. (Graph 2)

Happily, wonderfully, miraculously, Jackson Hole still has an essentially intact ecosystem; happily, wonderfully, miraculously, we're also the richest county in the richest country in the history of the world. Combine the three – our singular wealth, our singular environmental health, and our just-like-every-other-place growth – and you get Jackson Hole's opportunity, if not our moral imperative: to address the gap between what technology allows and what the earth can support. Figuring out such "true sustainability" is perhaps the paramount challenge of the 21st century, and arguably no other community in the world is as well-positioned to address it. Certainly no other community has as much to lose.



Graph 2

In columns earlier this year, I've argued how and why Jackson Hoe should pursue "true sustainability" (March 22, April 21, November 4, and November 18, all of which can be downloaded from http://charture.org/columns_schechter.php). My essential point is that the most direct way for us to realize this goal – and reap its attendant economic and social benefits – is to pursue becoming the world's first certified green resort community.

Today I'll focus on two complementary points: the type of leadership we'll need, and ten specific steps we can take.

My point of departure is the economic basket case that is California. Through the mid-1970s, California was awash in tax dollars, and used that money to fund an education system, infrastructure, and other public services ranked among the best in the country. Then, in 1978, the state's voters enacted Proposition 13, which limited the property taxes that had been the state's primary source of revenue. Proposition 13 didn't limit Californians' desires, though, and the result profligacy has created a situation where, in the last few months, officials have seriously considered having the state declare bankruptcy.

For a century or more, California has been the nation's trendsetter state. With Proposition 13, California signaled the start of an era of fiscal irresponsibility that eventually extended to governments and citizens alike. Equally important, Proposition 13 signaled the start of an era in which raising taxes to cover expenditures has become nearly unthinkable. The net result? A system of values and politics best summarized as "consume today; let someone else pay tomorrow." And while this ethic may reflect late 20th

century values, it's become firmly entrenched during the first decade of the 21st century.

By definition, this approach is unsustainable. By extension, the challenge facing 21st century leaders will be to align peoples' expectations with economic and environmental reality. This transition will be painful, and our collective sense of entitlement will result in howls of protest from all sides. The transition will have to be made, though, and the most successful leaders will be those who link two qualities sorely missing today: optimism about the future, and having all segments of society make small, evenly-distributed sacrifices.

How might such "hopeful sacrifice" play out in Jackson Hole? I can envision ten steps the community can take in 2010 to move us in that direction. The more of these that occur, the better our chances of fulfilling our potential to become a world leader in sustainability. Equally important, the more of these that occur, the better our chances of enjoying the long-term benefits that will result from our assuming such leadership.

- 1. Action: Devote a portion of every meeting to a sustainability-related topic.**
Who: All local organizations – public, private, and non-profit.
Meeting agendas reflect an organization's priorities. If an organization regularly devotes even a small amount of time to sustainability-related issues, that tells you something about what matters to them. Ditto if they don't.
- 2. Action: Create an Environment Commission**
Who: Town and County governments
Teton County and the Town of Jackson create boards and commissions to advise them on matters they care about, things like Planning, the Fair, Historic Preservation, and Parks and Recreation. Currently, they are contemplating creating a joint Environment Commission to advise on big-picture environmental concerns. If one is created, that will say something about priorities; ditto if it's not.
- 3. Action: Offset the greenhouse gases emitted by every flight into and out of the Jackson Hole Airport**
Who: Jackson Hole Airport Board
I've previously advocated this, and continue to feel it's not only the right thing to do, but will result in huge benefits for our tourism economy.
- 4. Action: Raise electricity rates one-half cent per kilowatt hour above the bare minimum**
Who: LVE board
Lower Valley can continue to charge rock-bottom rates, or it can raise prices slightly and invest the surplus in conservation and alternative energy generation. Such an investment may not make perfect economic sense but, as last year's financial market collapse suggests, "perfect economic sense" may be an imperfect concept. Further, 21st century leadership will require both leaders and their constituents to take a longer-term view toward the consequences of their expenditures. Here's an easy place to start.
- 5. Action: Devoting one mil of property taxes to "green" actions**
Who: Board of County Commissioners
When it comes to being green, Jackson Hole needs to put up or shut up. Part of putting up is spending money to back up our words. If Lower Valley can raise its rates slightly to "go green," surely Teton County – Lower Valley's new partner in energy-related issues – can do something similar.
- 6. Action: Re-institute a two percent lodging tax, and use the proceeds for "green" actions**
Who: Town and County governments

Tourists coming to Jackson Hole to enjoy our environment should help cover the costs of sustaining it.

7. Action: Sustainability pledge

Who: Every organization and individual in Teton County

Becoming a truly sustainable community will require everyone to contribute – we can't just rely on government. As a first step toward total community involvement, individuals, non-profits, businesses, and government alike can take a sustainability pledge, something along the lines of "We pledge to take appropriate sustainability-related actions, and measure, report, and constantly work to improve the outcomes."

8. Action: Inventory of "green actions"

Who: Sustainability coordinator

On a regular basis, a government or non-profit entity needs to inventory all sustainability-related activities taken in the community, then report progress (or lack thereof).

9. Action: Indicators

Who: Sustainability coordinator

Based on the inventory of the community's "green actions," the sustainability coordinator can develop key indicators to monitor progress and identify potential needs, next steps, and the like.

10. Action: Annual conference

Who: Sustainability coordinator

Taking actions is good; bringing together all those who involved for an annual assessment and celebration is equally important.

All of these steps are eminently do-able; so are many others. The issue is less what we do than actually doing something, and doing it soon. Like it or not, in another 30 days, we'll have one-tenth of the 21st century behind us, and be that much closer to having 9 billion people on the planet.