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**EMBARGOED For RELEASE: September 20, 2011, 12 AM GMT**

**September 27<sup>th</sup> is Earth Overshoot Day:  
*Humanity has exhausted the budget of what nature can provide this year***

(OAKLAND, CA, USA) – Humanity is surpassing nature’s budget for the year, and is now operating in overdraft, according to data from Global Footprint Network, an international research organization with offices in California and Geneva.

Similarly to the way a bank statement tracks income against expenditures, Global Footprint Network tracks human demand on nature (for example, for providing food, producing raw materials and absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>) against nature’s capacity to regenerate those resources and absorb the waste. Its calculations show that, in approximately nine months, we have surpassed a level of demand on resources that the planet would be able to sustainably support this year.

For the rest of the year, we will maintain our ecological deficit by depleting resource stocks and accumulating CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. “That’s like spending your annual salary three months before the year is over, and eating into savings year after year. Pretty soon, you run out of savings,” said Global Footprint Network President Dr. Mathis Wackernagel.

Our ecological overspending has become a vicious cycle, in which we draw down more and more principal at the same time our level of demand, or “spending,” grows. “From soaring food prices to the crippling effects of climate change, our economies are now confronting the reality of years of spending beyond our means,” said Dr. Wackernagel. “If we are to maintain stable societies and good lives, we can no longer sustain a widening budget gap between what nature is able to provide and how much our infrastructure, economies and lifestyles require.”

**Meeting the Needs of 7 Billion**

For the vast majority of human history, humanity has used nature’s services – to build cities and roads; provide food and create products; and absorb the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by human activities – at a rate that was well within the means of what nature could regenerate. But, sometime in the 1970s, we crossed a critical threshold. Human demand on nature began outstripping what it could renewably produce, a condition known as ecological overshoot.

Global Footprint Network’s preliminary 2011 calculations show we are now using resources at a rate it would take between 1.2 and 1.5 planets to sustainably support. Our research shows us on track to require the resources of two planets well before mid-century.

This year, Earth Overshoot Day comes as the UN is projecting the human population to reach 7 billion sometime in late October. Current resource trends beg the questions: How will we be able to meet the needs of a growing population? Support the increased consumption as millions in emerging economies join the swelling ranks of the middle class? Provide for the 2 billion alive today that lack access to enough resources to meet basic needs?

“Providing good lives for the world’s people is certainly possible – but it will not be possible using the resource-intensive development and growth models we have pursued in the past,” said Global Footprint Network Director of Research and Standards Dr. Juan Carlos Morales. “That means finding new models of progress and prosperity that limit demand on ecological assets. It also means maintaining the resources we have left as an ongoing source of wealth rather than liquidating them for fast cash.”

**Have We Reduced Global Overshoot?**

Earth Overshoot Day (based on a concept devised by UK-based [new economics foundation](#)) helps conceptualize the gap between what nature can regenerate, and how much is currently required to support human activities. But it is not, of course, possible to determine with 100% accuracy the exact moment we bust our budget. We are constantly working toward better data sets and methods that can help us more accurately capture the extent to which human demand exceeds nature’s supply, but it is not possible to count every fish. Hence, Earth Overshoot Day is meant as an estimate rather than as an exact date.

Ecological Footprint and biocapacity calculations Global Footprint Network made last year placed Earth Overshoot Day a few weeks earlier in the year than this year's estimates do. This has raised the question as to whether we have reduced global overshoot. The answer, unfortunately, is no. Global Footprint Network is constantly improving the calculations and data sets that are the basis for determining Earth Overshoot Day, and as such the date of Earth Overshoot Day varies from year to year.

Currently, we are undertaking some revisions to the way we compare productivity across different geographies and land types – how we incorporate the output of a forest in Russia, for example, and fishing ground in Chile into a single standardized number. If we look at where Earth Overshoot Day would have fallen over time based on these new assumptions (which we are still testing), we would see overshoot continuing to grow slightly year over year. (See the [Media Backgrounder](#) for more information, and to see when Earth Overshoot Day would have fallen over time using our most current assumptions.)

Our methodology does change and may continue to shift, but no matter what scientific approach we have used, and what improvements we have implemented to try to account for both human demand and nature's supply, the trends remain consistent: we are in significant overshoot, and overshoot is growing. By any analysis we are well over budget, and that debt is compounding.

The *when* is less important than the *what*: a mounting ecological debt, and the interest we are paying on that debt – food shortages, plummeting wildlife populations, disappearing forests, degraded land productivity and the build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> in our atmosphere and ocean, with devastating human and monetary costs.

### **Overshoot and the Global Economy**

In spite of the global recession, resource trends indicate that since October 2008, humanity's resource demand has been on the rise, although more slowly than in the first eight years of the millennium.

There is more and more evidence that rapidly rising resource costs, in particular for food and energy, played a major role in accelerating, if not sparking, the current global downturn. Now we are trying to reverse the downturn by building jobs and stabilizing our economies. But this depends on a stable resource supply.

"As resource constraints tighten even more, it's going to feel like trying to run upward on a down escalator," Dr. Wackernagel said. "As we look to rebuild our economies to be healthy and robust, now is the moment to come up with ways of doing so that will continue to work and be relevant in the future. Long-term recovery will only succeed, and can only be maintained, if it occurs along with systematical reductions to our dependence on resources."

It is possible to turn the tide. Global Footprint Network and its network of partners is working with individuals, organizations and governments around the globe to make decisions that are aligned with ecological reality – decisions that can help close the ecological budget gap and provide for a prosperous future in the face of changing and challenging resource trends.

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*Global Footprint Network is an international research organization working to make ecological limits central decision-making by advancing the use of the Ecological Footprint, a resource management tool that measures how much nature we have, how much we use and who uses what.*

To learn more about Earth Overshoot Day and how it is calculated, go to:  
<http://www.footprintnetwork.org/earthovershootday>.

To calculate your own personal Ecological Footprint, and learn what you can do to reduce it, go to  
<http://www.footprintnetwork.org/calculator>.

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