

# U.S. Environmental Trust (USET)

You are the president and founding member of the U.S. Environmental Trust (USET), a Texas-based environmental organization founded in the late 1980s. USET's mission is to promote domestic environmental management and environmental stewardship. USET grew out of a collective concern for the nation's fishable waterways, many of which experienced excessive pollution from industrial sources during the 1970s and 1980s.

Until recently, your organization has enjoyed a small but active membership from individuals across the country. USET never intended to grow in size to compete with more recognizable environmental groups. In the past it benefited from active partnerships with such organizations and has shared research and collaborated on projects on occasion. In the last five years, however, USET's membership has declined steadily—outside of the close network of original members, it seems that younger generations are choosing to donate money or join environmental organizations that also have a strong political agenda or are more recognizable in the public realm.

As a group USET has never carried a strong political agenda. Its goals as a small organization have always been to “act smart and act locally,” in the name of the environment. However, many of the organization's members are politically active and many are financially influential.

Because of USET's leadership and interest in the role of immigration on the environment, you have been invited to be on a Blue Ribbon Commission on Immigration-Related Costs & Benefits, set up by the President and Congress. As the president of USET you have many concerns, not the least of which is the vitality of your organization. Your organization has chosen you to be its representative, and together you have come up with the following main ideas to share during the meeting.



USET research and data from the recent U.S. Census have convinced you of the following:

- Immigration is taking a toll on the country's already limited natural resources. Not only will your children not be able to enjoy the same abundance of open spaces, fresh water and clear skies that you did growing up, they will likely also have to compete or pay heavily for drinking water, fuel, and even clean air.
- Social Security payments will see you safely through your retirement, but you children may have to compete against immigrants for limited Social Security dollars. Clearly the immigrant pool is tapping into a Social Security network that will soon be insolvent given the current population growth in the U.S.
- The strength of the U.S. economy is threatened by immigration. Foreign-born students are increasingly coming to the U.S. to earn specialized advanced degrees. They are making it more difficult for U.S. citizens to earn spots in comparable academic programs and for citizens to find well-paying, secure jobs.

Following is some greater detail about your beliefs on these issues.

### Immigration and the environment

Recent studies lead you to believe that regulating immigration more strictly is an essential step to protecting America's natural resources. Population growth in the United States is already a huge problem with respect to the environment, although you have noticed that many environmental organizations do not address the issue as one of the principal drivers in environmental protection. You are beginning to believe that America's stream of immigrants are taking advantage of resources that, frankly, its current residents are more entitled to. There is clearly a limit to natural resources such as water and open land that should first be allocated amongst the nation's current residents.

The U.S. population has been growing by leaps and bounds every year, and shows no sign of slowing down, and a rapidly growing U.S. population is a serious threat to the environment. You might want to share with the commission the following statistic: If we had limited immigration to the level of emigration in 1970, the U.S. population would have stabilized at 255 million in 2020, and gradually decreased to an environmentally sustainable level. Instead, we have increased immigration to over five times its replacement levels!

It's a simple fact: Our country would be better off with fewer people consuming its natural resources—water, energy, land. Because of its increasing importance and impact on annual population growth, immigration plays a significant role in our goal of stabilizing the U.S. population. USET's research has indicated that a cap on annual immigration levels at half of today's one million would significantly reduce the expected population of 2050 and therefore greatly improve the projected strain on resources.



However, you certainly wouldn't want to sound like you are blaming all of America's environmental problems on immigrants! Immigration goals must be set within a larger framework of a U.S. population policy that aims at slowing U.S. and world population growth as well as promoting a balance between U.S. population and the environment through increased energy efficiency, conservation of natural resources, and sustainable environmental practices.

## Policy proposals

Your conviction that America's natural resources are threatened by unchecked immigration policy and your desire to grow USET to an organization makes the Presidential Commission a pivotal forum to:

1. get the commission to agree to a 5-year cap on immigration to 100,000 people per year,
2. reduce incentives for people to come to the U.S. by agreeing to a limited Social Security coverage package for non-U.S. citizens and by giving automatic U.S. citizenship only to offspring of immigrants—not other family members, and
3. reduce incentives for immigrants to have large families; benefits and incentives could be allocated on a “sliding scale” as families grow in size.

**Immigration caps.** Hard immigration caps might be the most effective policy decision the Administration can take. The economic and ecological realities of U.S. population growth should make this an easy political decision. Policy of this nature can also be “layered” to include restrictions on amnesty, illegal immigration, and citizenship for illegal immigrants' children. Perhaps the U.S. should consider economic development programs in the countries that “send” the largest percentage of immigrants to the U.S. It is likely that more people would choose to remain in their own countries if the economic and environmental conditions improved significantly.



U.S. environmental degradation can be prevented if immigration were curbed. Statistically, the United States' rapid growth can be almost entirely attributed to immigration—the current average fertility rate is only 2.05 children per family, which amounts to a near zero-growth rate. Immigration, far more than the average American's consumption pattern, is the root cause of the country's environmental problems. Between 1970 and 1990, U.S. energy use rose nearly 36 percent because of the larger, immigration-driven U.S. population.

**Limited Social Security coverage package.** Social Security was designed to provide retirement income for American citizens who worked in the United States. Paying benefits to non-citizens will deprive millions of Americans who pay into Social Security their entire lives. They now face the possibility of a bankrupt system when they retire. Limiting the extent to which immigrants are eligible for Social Security at least ensures a greater likelihood of maintaining network solvency. Restricting the Social Security package offered to immigrants would likely discourage many immigrants from choosing to relocate to the United States.

**Granting U.S. citizenship to families.** The United States is the only industrialized country that provides for non-nuclear family immigration entitlement. If these categories were eliminated, the annual total immigration level could then be reduced by about 525,000. Reducing the categories of qualifying family members for citizenship disrupts “chain” immigration, whereby a foreign-born U.S. citizen sponsors his or her siblings, plus their siblings’ spouses, and then the new immigrants’ spouses may later, upon becoming U.S. citizens, sponsor their family members ad infinitum. “Chain” immigration could be reduced further by removing the provision that confers family immigration status on the adult married children of foreign-born U.S. citizens. As a result, the U.S. would be able to keep its growing population in check and maintain a tighter grip on natural resource management and protection.