

Some Negative Effects of Urban Sprawl



Photo by: Larry Korhnak

Urban sprawl is characterized by unmanaged, widespread, linear growth. It is not only unattractive to most people, it is also not sustainable.

As urban populations grow and more people want privacy and greenspace, development will inevitably creep beyond city limits, creating wildland-urban interface. If the development occurs without consideration for infrastructure, commercial needs, efficient transportation options, or quality of life, it can degrade rather than enhance the community. Without considering the potential consequences of new development and effectively planning to reduce negative effects, communities end up with urban sprawl. Urban sprawl has been defined as “low density development beyond the edge of service and employment, which separates where people live from where they shop, work, recreate and educate thus requiring cars to move between zones” (1000 Friends of Florida 2005).

Despite the attraction and the benefits of everyone having a lawn, trees, and a big house, people are beginning to recognize the negative consequences of this land development pattern. The negative effects that sprawl can have on a community, its people, and its resources help demonstrate why land-use planning is so important.

Ecological Effects of Urban Sprawl

Development plans that promote sprawl have a number of consequences for local ecosystems (Luther 2005). Many hold true for any development in the wildland-urban interface.

- Destruction of wildlife habitat.
- Introduction of non-native invasive plants and animals into natural areas.
- Increased human and pet exposure to diseases such as rabies and Lyme disease.
- Increased risks of water pollution from oil and gasoline washing off paved surfaces and from pesticides, lawn fertilizers, and other chemicals.
- Increased potential for flooding and soil erosion due to impervious surfaces such as concrete or pavement.
- Decrease in groundwater for wells and irrigation caused by abundance of impervious surfaces.
- Increased risk to life and property from wildfires.

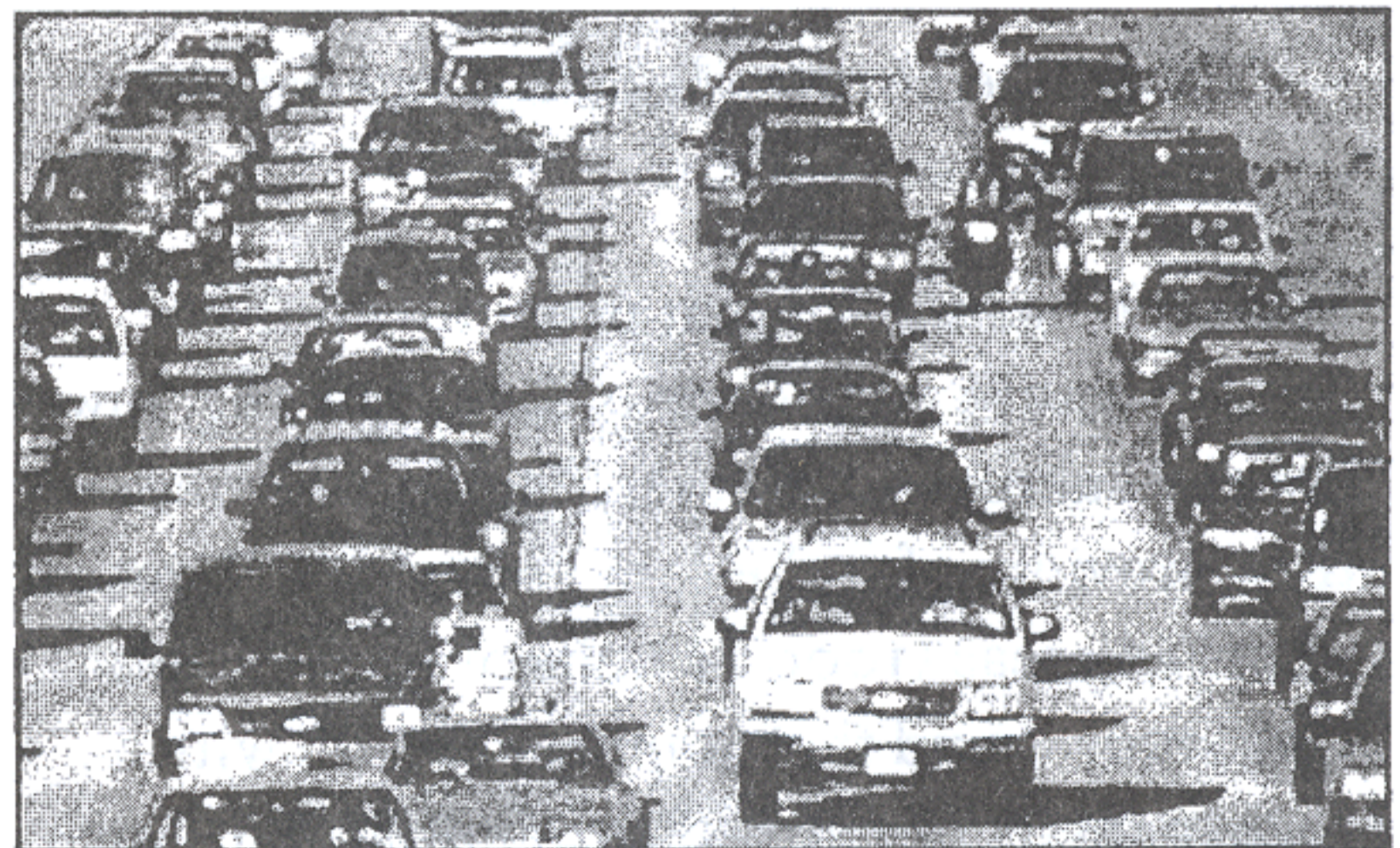


Photo by: Reed Saxon, Associate Press

Traffic is one side-effect of sprawl.