

Freedom Matters

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We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

Sustainable Development Is Unsustainable. Part 5. "Will We Run Out of Horses?"

by Bob Bowman

Yes, running out of horses was once an issue. In the 1800s, New York City was at the limits of horse urine pollution. Cars solved that. Now, re oil, Matthew Simmons in a white paper (see *Freedom Matters* #18) claims that circa 2007, the world may be halfway to pumping out its total accessible oil supplies. After such halfway point, production declines along an ever steeper curve to some long-term value far below current demand. In an undated paper written after 2000, and titled *The World's Giant Oil Fields*, Simmons notes that some two-thirds of the world's daily production of oil comes from fields that were discovered prior to 1970. There are still 20-some giant fields that have not come on-line as yet, but Simmons notes that none of these is projected to be nearly as big as the old "supergiant" oil fields. Simmons laments that published data do not exist to determine how fast we are depleting the giant oil fields, but he says that we do know that recently discovered oil fields are smaller and have been quickly depleted. The indisputable point that Simmons makes is that *oil field depletion is a fact of life*.

Simmons notes there are two sides to this energy debate. Some believe we are nearly at the peak rate of production of oil (i.e., we have pumped out nearly half of the world's supply of oil). Others believe that oil exploration and technological advances will produce a glut of energy, if not of oil, on and on forever.

Who is right? The short answer is simple: we don't know. Re oil, a 30 year projection of its production was published by *The Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2003 (this issue #19 of *Freedom Matters* is being distributed after that date, of course). In that projection, titled "Oil on the Way," the *Wall Street Journal* showed a graph of the following values, in **millions of barrels of oil per day** (data of the International Energy Agency, which was set up in 1974 to counter OPEC):

Year	2000	2010	2020	2030
Non-OPEC	43	47	46	42
OPEC	29	35	51	64
Total	72	82	97	106

Note two things. First, non-OPEC oil production peaks somewhere just before or after 2010. This may reflect the half-way depletion of non-OPEC oil, since if non-OPEC nations could pump more, they would. Second, world oil production is projected to increase at least til 2030, and perhaps beyond. Does anyone really doubt that long before 2030, the U.S. will open the oil fields in the Alaska national park? Or that the looming natural gas shortage in the U.S. will result in renewed drilling for gas

in the lower 48 states? Or that efforts will soon be increased to bring alternate sources of energy on-line?

What alternate energy sources exist (besides horses, already noted)? Simmons briefly cites them (except horses), in various of his papers. For one, fossil fuels other than oil exist. Known supplies of oil shales and coal will last *hundreds of years at current rates of energy use*. Supplies of methane may also be huge enough to consider, but little has been published that evaluates that source.

For another, hydroelectric power currently exists. However, that is already extensively developed. Moreover, it is now threatened by the environmental drive for "wild" rivers. So hydroelectric does not look capable of significant expansion.

Nuclear power still represents a mainly untapped source, capable of considerable expansion. Problems of safety seem no worse than with other sources of energy, but there are major political problems to be resolved if that source will be utilized.

Geothermal, wind and solar energy are also being tapped, at varying environmental and technological costs. Simmons asserts that none of them can ever supply more than a minor fraction of civilization's energy needs. Animal power (e.g., horses) is still in use, but also will never be more than minor.

Finally, energy from fusion (the process the sun uses) is a likely long-term bet. Yet, it is still a laboratory dream.

By improving efficiency, the world can stretch energy supplies. Exotic example: the fuel-cell/ hydrogen approach is partly in use, but it is still costly and needs more development.

One thing is sure. Development equals progress. The retrenchment sought by "Neo-Malthusians" is unwise. It would stifle progress, dooming our species in the long-term.

Topic to be continued.

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