feature

Destroying

our

Environment

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he rate of animal extinctions due to toxic environments is 1,000 to 10,000 times the natural alive," 9th Grade Biology Teacher Kristen LaFon rate. At the current rate of global warming (2 degrees Celsius per year), roughly 18 percent of all insect species will be lost by 2100; if the planet were to warm by 3.2 degrees Celsius, that number would rise to 49% (EarthDay). Since 1975, more than 90% of the reefs in the Florida Keys have lost their living coral cover (PCRF). According to the United State's Food and Agricultural Organization, an estimated 18 million acres (7.3 million hectares) of forest, which is roughly the size of the country of Panama, are lost each year. Toxicity in our environment is everywhere and is negatively affecting everything. From our coral reefs to animals to trees, one thing is abundantly clear: humans' actions are destroying our earth.

Animals that have recently gone extinct include the Spix Macaw, the Golden Toad, Po'ouli, and the Madeiran Large White Butterfly. These extinctions are due to warming climate or from humans destroying their habitats. One example of human contributions to extinction is deforestation where, according to LiveScience, almost 70% of animals and plants are affected.

"Trees provide a majority of the oxygen that the aerobic organisms of the world use to stay said. "We continue to increase the rate at which we deforest. The deforestation alone releases greenhouse gases, not only is this bad but then the trees that normally help manage greenhouse gases are also gone, so it is a double whammy. Plants use Carbon Dioxide in photosynthesis, so the more plants and trees we have, the more we can reduce our Carbon Dioxide levels."

Trees help in the water cycle because they stop polluted runoff. They also help prevent soil erosion by anchoring soil. According to science news website LiveScience, scientists estimate that 1/3 of the world's arable land has been lost to erosion. Not only does destroying our environment affect animals, insects, and trees, but it also affects us humans.

"A decline in biodiversity leads to negative outcomes, almost like a domino effect," LaFon said. "It isn't just about the coral, or the polar bear, or the rhino... it is about the conditions we are creating that impact the world we live in. I have been to the Great Barrier Reef and to say it was spectacular was a vast understatement.



The thought of it not being there for your generation makes me sick. In addition, people who live in amazing natural areas rely on tourism for their livelihood. Not only is climate change bad for the environment but also for those that rely on the environment to survive. whether that be growing their own food (which they can't due to flooding) or raising livestock or anyone in the tourism industry."

Many people rely on tourism to make money, but if ecosystems like coral reefs continue to be

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Coral reefs house an infinite number of animals and plant life, but they are decreasing in size because of factors like pollution, disease, overfishing, dynamite and cyanide fishing, sedimentation, and bleaching caused by rising ocean temperatures.

According to The National Ocean Service, "traps set too close to reefs and marine debris, such as ghost traps, lost nets, monofilament, and lines can damage coral reefs, which take a long time to recover." Traps like these also remove herbivorous fish that are integral to an ecosvstem.

"When you lose biodiversity, then food chains and food webs start to collapse which then result in starving animals and potential extinction," LaFon said. "In some cases, losing just one species can literally mean the downfall of 10-15 other species. These types of species are called keystone species. Nature needs balance and it functions well when balanced. When nature is unbalanced (as it is now) we see the catastrophic consequences play out in the animal kingdom."

Our environment is being destroyed more and more everyday. What are we, as humans, going to do to find a way to preserve our one and only planet? What are we going to do to save wildlife and plantlife? How far are we going to let this situation go before we finally start to make a change?

"Evolution is a long slow process, and we destroyed, there will be no attraction for tourists. are seeing massive numbers of amphibians who can survive the increase in temperatures," LaFon said. "Many scientists are alarmed about the reduction of biodiversity that is occurring due to all the changes in our environment."

