

Study covers air, soil, water

# Environmental indicators steady but group sees new threats

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The "quality of life" in the United States—as measured by seven environmental indicators — remained virtually unchanged last year as the nation wound up a decade marked by the enactment of many environmental protection laws, the National Wildlife Federation reported in its 11th annual study of environmental trends.

NWF found in its 1980 Environmental Quality Index study that four of the seven resources that go into the index—wildlife, water, soil, and forests—remained unchanged in quality over the past year.

Another component of the EQI—air quality—improved in 1979, while two others—minerals and living space—declined in quality. Last year was the first time since 1970 that the majority of the seven natural resources did

not register a decline on the EQI.

During 1979 there was "progress on a number of fronts," from pollution abatement and solar research to wetlands protection and wildlife management," explains the EQI report, which is published in the February issue of National Wildlife magazine.

But while many past gains were consolidated, "at the political level, environmental programs and priorities suffered setbacks from which they may not soon recover," the report concludes.

The EQI is an analysis of the state of the nation's natural resources based on a combination of objective measurements and the subjective judgments of the NWF staff in consultation with government experts and academic researchers. Five federal agencies—the

Bureau of Land Management, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, and the Soil Conservation Service—now cooperate with the Federation in the collection of resources data.

Summaries of the 1980 EQI reports on the seven resources follow:

**WILDLIFE**

**No Change.** For the first time in more than a decade, the EQI trendline for wildlife stopped going down in 1979. This was the result of years of hard work in wildlife management, habitat protection, and pollution abatement. But conservationists worry about the future.

Little was done last year to improve vast acreages of badly abused rangeland in the West, they said. And in Congress, there was a fierce backlash against all environmental constraints on development.

There were other ominous conflicts between energy and wildlife in 1979. While Congress debated relaxing air standards so more coal can be burned, acid rain containing pollutants from industrial smokestacks and car exhaust began showing up in Wisconsin and Michigan.

Last fall, the Interior Department okayed oil exploration on the Georges Bank off Cape Cod, one of the world's most productive fisheries, while U.S. crews were mopping up a monumental leak from an offshore Mexican oil well.

**MINERALS**

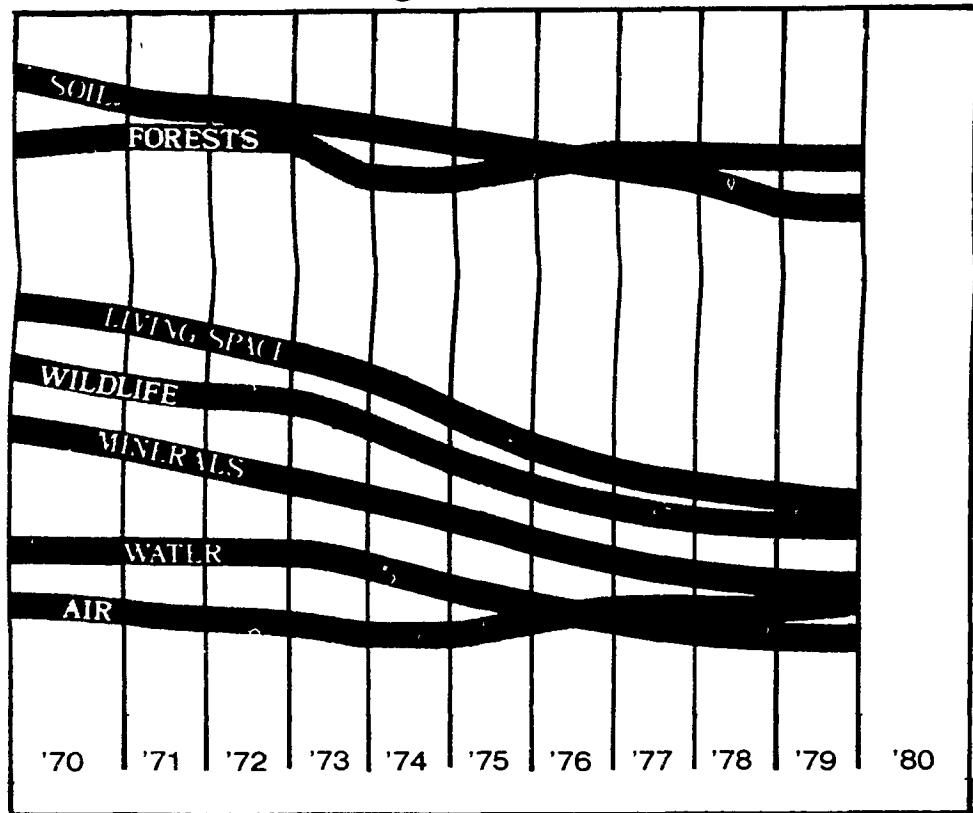
**Down.** Of the seven resources analyzed in the EQI, minerals are perhaps the easiest to squander and the hardest to retrieve. This underlines the seriousness of the fact that in 1979, the U.S. moved one year closer to the end of the petroleum era without a comprehensive energy conservation program.

Instead of emphasizing conservation, President Carter proposed a massive and expensive program to develop "synthetic" fossil fuels, to locate and produce more domestic oil, and to create an almost dictatorial "energy mobilization board" that could bypass many environmental safeguards.

In the year of Three Mile Island, gas lines, and doubled fuel prices, all of the energy news was not bad. Energy efficiency in U.S. homes and apartments increased and industrial use decreased.

Improved auto mileage  
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## 1980 EQ SUMMARY



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