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Abstract: The African continent and its people face a host of environmental issues. Almost one third of all cropland and permanent pastures are degraded in some way each year. Droughts cause many problems, eroding soil and vegetation. Because there is poor soil quality to begin with, the varying climate conditions and reliance on mainly rain to water the crops makes it very difficult for crops to survive in long periods of time without rainfall. A serious problem that has developed in the last couple of decades has been due to the people. There has been major deforestation and the clearing of vegetation for agricultural purposes. Endangered species are part of another major issue in Africa. Gorillas have become nearly extinct in the wild. This decrease is the result of habitat loss due to expanding communities and overpopulation in some areas, as well as poaching.
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Africa's Environmental Problems

It is very important to be aware of some of the devastating environmental issues that the continent of Africa and all of its people face.

Almost one third of all cropland and permanent pastures are degraded in some way each year. Droughts cause many problems, eroding soil and vegetation. Because there is poor soil quality to begin with, the varying climate conditions and reliance on mainly rain to water the crops makes it very difficult for crops to survive in long periods of time without rainfall. Overgrazing of cattle also causes pastures to become scarce.

A serious problem that has developed in the last couple of decades has been due to the people. There has been major deforestation and the clearing of vegetation for agricultural purposes. Many of the native people rely on wood for fuel in their households and communities.

Total deforestation in the past two decades has amounted to the loss of over half of the forest lands. Also, rainforests, which are the homes to valuable and rare plants and animals, have decreased to under 20% of the total remaining rainforests worldwide.

Endangered species are part of another major issue in Africa. Gorillas have become nearly extinct in the wild. This decrease is the result of habitat loss due to expanding communities and overpopulation in some areas, as well as poaching.

Some people kill gorillas for their hands, head, and meat. It is believed that only 1000 remain in the wild today.

The black and white rhinoceros are also endangered, due to poaching for the rhinos' horns. Today, there are less than 2,400 rhinoceroses left.

Other endangered species of Africa include elephants, which are killed for their tusks.

Elephant tusks are made of ivory, which is very valuable in trade. Also, pygmy hippopotamuses are killed for their meat.

However, one more devastating factor in the decrease of this species' population is the fact that swampy forests are being destroyed for agricultural purposes.

The African wild dog, a rare and unique species found only native to Africa, is also endangered. This is due, in part, to the increase in roads, as roadway deaths claim the lives of hundreds of African wild dogs each year. Due to drought and deforestation, these dogs must travel farther and compete with more animals to find water.

Farmers and ranchers kill them when found disturbing their crops or other animals. There are now less than 3,000 left in the wild.

The mountain zebra is also close to extinction. There are now two reserves for these animals in southern Cape Providence, but there are very few individuals, around 200 or so, remaining in the wild. These zebras are hunted as game and their habitat is destroyed as the increasing numbers of humans move into the area.

Other endangered species that are native to Africa include the cheetah, of which there are only about 25,000 left, and the leopard, which is also quickly declining in population.

The pygmy chimpanzee, addax, (the African antelope) and Nile crocodile are considered endangered as well. Many of their habitats are being taken over by humans or they are killed by poachers.

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