



[Journal](#) > [Table of Contents](#) > [Volume 2 Issue 3](#) > Abstract

Exemptionalism vs environmentalism: the crucial debate on the value of ecosystem health

J. Cairns Jr*

*Department of Biology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24061, USA*

Abstract

The concept of exemptionalism holds that human society is exempt from the biophysical laws that control other species because of human ingenuity, technology, creativity and economic systems. Some economists believe that resource depletion is irrelevant because alternative resources will be developed if there is enough demand backed by money. A related statement is that any problem created by technology can be resolved by technology. Within these frames of reference, ecosystem health is of minor, arguably no, importance to the exemptionalist.

The concept of environmentalism views *Homo sapiens* as just another biological species that is tightly controlled by biophysical laws, but which is able to modify the biophysical laws more than other species. This view acknowledges human society's dependence on ecological life support systems and the services they provide and assumes that the well being of human society is closely linked with the health of natural systems. Only within the Inter framework will ecosystem health be a major concern of human society. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd and AEHMS. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Sustainable development; Carrying capacity; Sustainability; Biophysical laws

Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management: 2 (3); 331-338

| [SOCIETY INFO](#) | [CONFERENCES](#) | [JOURNAL](#) | [ECOVISION BOOKS](#) |

| [SEARCH](#) | [CONTACT](#) | [MEMBERSHIP](#) | [HOME](#) |