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## A Balancing Act

**M**ost articles about balancing development and open space seem to focus on a single issue: water quantity, water quality, habitat, perhaps recreation. But I recently read a “what if” article that made me think in a different way about that balance. It led to a back and forth argument in my mind of first one position and then the other. Contemplating both sides of the argument was an intriguing process, one that informed more than the article might have intended.

The scenario was “what if everyone lived in California and the rest of the country was left as open space?” Definitely the article presented some interesting points to ponder. Its thesis (boldly stated in its title) was that perhaps sprawl is not such a bad thing, offering a number of arguments in favor of spreading out rather than concentrating development. It was an exercise in counter-intuitive thinking for me, always a useful way to keep thought processes sharp in contemplating views contrary to my own.

First, I must say that the reason for choosing California was not only for its size (although we all know that Alaska and Texas have more land mass) but also its climate – no offense meant to the two larger states, but probably they would not be most people’s first choice. California would allow a density of about two people per acre, with a little room left over.

The article’s first point, of course, is that not all land in the state is equally habitable, what with the deserts and the rugged mountain peaks. Obviously, this was not a point that the United States considered when forcing Native Americans to move to lands reserved for them in the less



desirable and generally less arable parts of this country – until minerals deemed more valuable than their way of life were discovered and they were forced to constrict their homesteads repeatedly, with sad results. So that is a point I concede regarding the value of spreading out rather than utilizing a finite space.

Next in the “everyone lives in California” scenario: where do we grow food if the land is entirely occupied by human residences? If the area formerly covered by orange groves is now living space, then only Florida is available to grow citrus – and that is a long commute to work each day if everyone lives in California. Otherwise, we import from other countries or we do without the fresh foods we love. So spreading out to allow more farming is a benefit.

Counter point: in agricultural areas turned residential development, sometimes developers design to keep small “pocket farms” interspersed between the sections of homes. In the places where I am familiar with this development scheme, the farmers have a tough time.

Anytime that the fields are fertilized, the neighbors complain. Definitely hog pens cause protest. If the farmers have to spray for insects, they have to provide advance notice to the neighbors, who have in some instances managed to prevent all spraying, meaning the produce sometimes does not survive. The additional hurdles placed in the way of economic success in this kind of farming make it a difficult, sometimes impossible, livelihood. Where I live now, farms are constantly snapped up and divided into home sites. With no local agriculture, folks complain about shipped-in hothouse tomatoes.

The California example notes the social benefits of humans not living on top of each other. Frequently referenced studies report that rats packed together too densely turn aggressive and hostile, with behavioral scientists drawing all kinds of extrapolations to the human condition. And it is true that most of us prefer to have room to move rather than tripping (or driving) over our neighbors on the way to the food store.

# Heavy-Duty GPS Antenna Tripods

#5119-10-XXX - model shown

#5119-11-XXX - includes precise adjusters

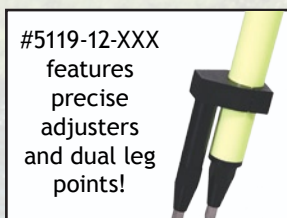
#5119-12-XXX - includes adjusters and dual points

The 5119-10-XXX is similar to the popular SECO 5119-00-XXX, but stronger. This heavy-duty tripod features a 6-inch-diameter, round head which easily holds lasers or robots. All three models are suitable for GPS and machine-control applications.

The #5119-11-XXX has the same standard features as the #5119-10-XXX but includes precise adjusters to make centering the 10-minute vial easier.

The #5119-12-XXX is identical to the #5119-11-XXX with the addition of double leg points.

Weighs approx. 20 lb (9.07 kg)



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Counter point: scientific studies also conclude that overcrowding affects different organisms in different ways, humans providing one such example. While we may perceive cities as being more violent than less populated areas, the per capita incidence of street violence is not different from elsewhere. The highest suicide rates are in the lowest population density states, and lowest in the states with the highest population densities. Perhaps social health is not impaired by density after all.

Anti-density argument: too much density creates too much impervious surface, resulting in increased runoff and flooding, as well as transport of pollutants to our water courses. Counter point: There are options to reduce or eliminate these problems. Green roof installations, far more common in urbanized areas than rural or suburban developments, can reduce runoff by 80%. Pervious pavement, used both in roadways and parking lots, allows more infiltration and replenishes the aquifer while reducing runoff. Of course, these techniques could be applied in the "sprawl" areas as well, but it isn't yet the norm.

A big anti-density argument: traffic congestion! Considering the hypothetical seat of the U.S. population is California, road rage scenes in Los Angeles a few years ago spring to mind. Maybe there is something to this argument. But wait – a counter point: as people try to avoid the more congested areas, they seek short cuts through less developed areas. Despite minimal development, traffic can be horrendous. Just two weeks ago I spent two and a half hours driving seventy miles from my best friend's house in West Virginia to Arlington, Virginia. Most of the area I traversed was not heavily built up. But the lack of public transportation (the reason I was driving instead of riding the rails) made it necessary for everyone to funnel onto the same highways. Building more roads probably isn't the answer, as they, too, would fill up quickly while using up land that could otherwise be used as farms or construction sites.

Definitely the article raised some interesting points to ponder. Maybe sprawl does have some benefits. Certainly we cannot access all the resources of this land if we are living miles from those commodities. How can we drive cars in California if no one lives in Oklahoma or Montana to drill for oil? On the other hand... *A*