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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

California
Education and the Environment Initiative

Human Imprint

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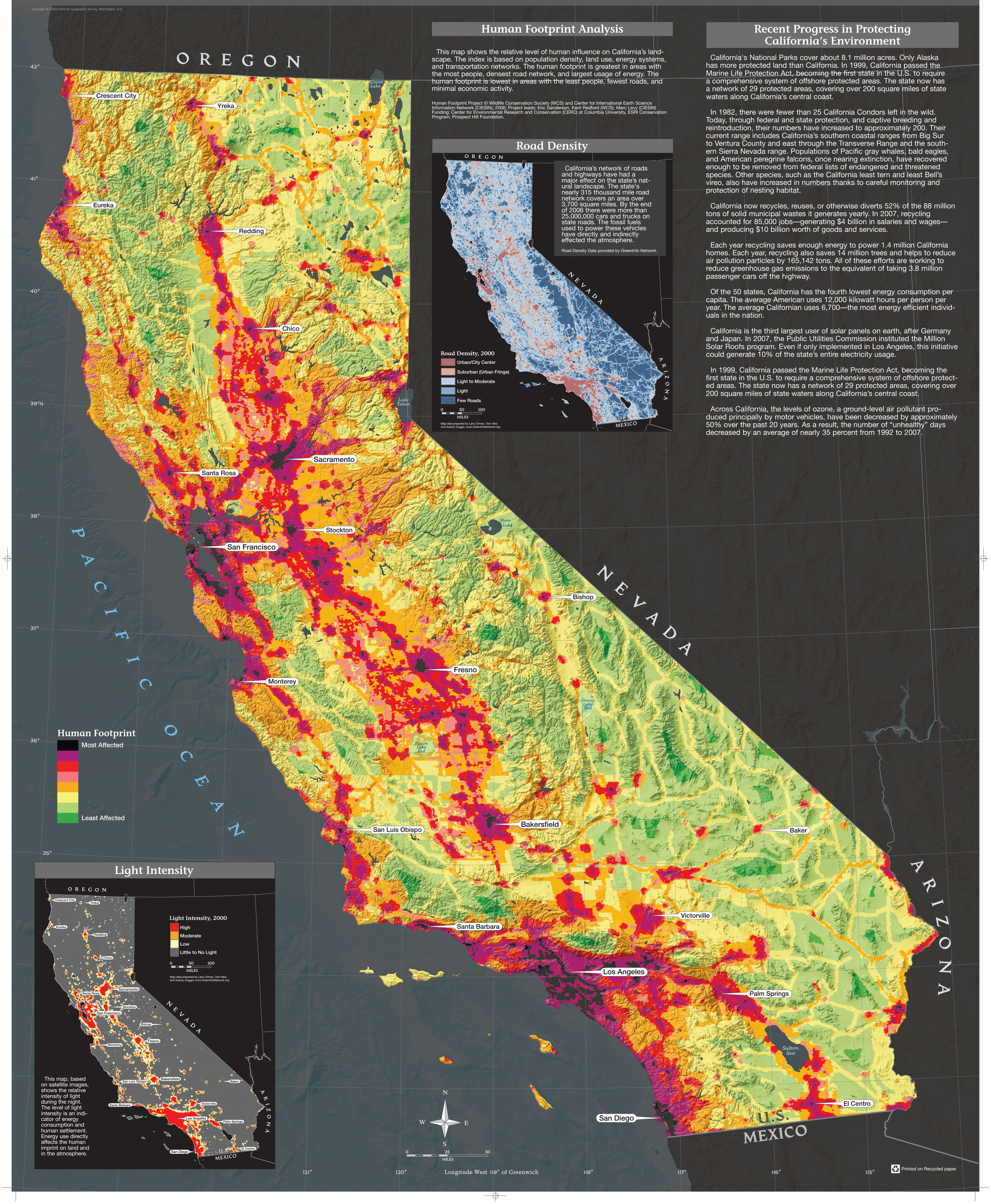

Human Footprint Analysis

This map shows the relative level of human influence on California's landscape. The index is based on population density, land use, energy systems, and transportation networks. The human footprint is greatest in areas with the most people, densest road network, and largest usage of energy. The human footprint is lowest in areas with the least people, fewest roads, and minimal economic activity.

Human Footprint Project © Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), 2006; Project leads: Eric Sanderson, Kent Redford (WCS); Marc Levy (CIESIN) Funding: Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC) at Columbia University, ESRI Conservation Program, Prospect Hill Foundation.

Recent Progress in Protecting California's Environment

California's National Parks cover about 8.1 million acres. Only Alaska has more protected land than California. In 1999, California passed the Marine Life Protection Act, becoming the first state in the U.S. to require a comprehensive system of offshore protected areas. The state now has a network of 29 protected areas, covering over 200 square miles of state waters along California's central coast.

In 1982, there were fewer than 25 California Condors left in the wild. Today, through federal and state protection, and captive breeding and reintroduction, their numbers have increased to approximately 200. Their current range includes California's southern coastal ranges from Big Sur to Ventura County and east through the Transverse Range and the southern Sierra Nevada range. Populations of Pacific gray whales, bald eagles, and American peregrine falcons, once nearing extinction, have recovered enough to be removed from federal lists of endangered and threatened species. Other species, such as the California least tern and least Bell's vireo, also have increased in numbers thanks to careful monitoring and protection of nesting habitat.

California now recycles, reuses, or otherwise diverts 52% of the 88 million tons of solid municipal wastes it generates yearly. In 2007, recycling accounted for 85,000 jobs—generating $4 billion in salaries and wages—and producing $10 billion worth of goods and services.

Each year recycling saves enough energy to power 1.4 million California homes. Each year, recycling also saves 14 million trees and helps to reduce air pollution particles by 165,142 tons. All of these efforts are working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the equivalent of taking 3.8 million passenger cars off the highway.

Of the 50 states, California has the fourth lowest energy consumption per capita. The average American uses 12,000 kilowatt hours per person per year. The average Californian uses 6,700—the most energy efficient individuals in the nation.

California is the third largest user of solar panels on earth, after Germany and Japan. In 2007, the Public Utilities Commission instituted the Million Solar Roofs program. Even if only implemented in Los Angeles, this initiative could generate 10% of the state's entire electricity usage.

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Across California, the levels of ozone, a ground-level air pollutant produced principally by motor vehicles, have been decreased by approximately 50% over the past 20 years. As a result, the number of "unhealthy" days decreased by an average of nearly 35 percent from 1992 to 2007.

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