

# Why we might not go extinct

Contributed by Alice Friedemann  
07 May 2013

## The case against extinction

I think the end of fossil fuels and all that they enable us to do, e.g., microchips, global supply chains, etc., has a 95-98% chance of saving us from extinction because:

1. Carbon dioxide and methane will start to go down due to peak oil and coal (Hart, Heinberg, Höök, Nel, Patzek) and natural gas: Shale Oil and Gas Will Not Save Us.

2. Our ability to do any kind of harm to any resource will diminish drastically once oil and oil equivalent fuels diminish because so many large vehicles and any other equipment with combustion engines won't operate anymore:

- farm tractors will no longer compress and erode topsoil (or grow enough food to feed 7+ billion people)
- earth moving machines will no longer harvest coal and other minerals and metals
- our roads, bridges, airports, and docks will last less than 100 years because we didn't build anything with cement to last over a century (unlike Roman cement, which is still going strong). We won't have the energy to rebuild or maintain most of our infrastructure
- It will be much harder to chop down (rain)forests with roads crumbling and large trucks gone
- There won't be ships that can go to the ends of the earth to harvest the last schools of fish. Marine reserves have often restored fish populations faster than anyone expected.
- due to lack of fuel, future world wars or world war on the scale of WWI & II will not be possible. Wars will be far more local, more like pre-WWI.
- Although biodiversity loss will probably increase initially as anyone with a gun goes out hunting, that's likely to change because the people who live where hunters can get to on foot or bicycle will defend their territory. The same goes for fishing and foraging.

3. The book "The Earth Without Us" gives me great hope that the earth will recover rather rapidly.

4. In 2075 when sea levels start to rise, so many people will have already died off from the decline in fossil fuels that there will be plenty of room for coastal dwellers to move to

5. The loss of our ability to make microchips and breakdown in supply chains will be nearly as important as the loss of oil in rapidly changing civilization back to wood-based energy, and also increase the rate and numbers of people dying.

I don't want to diminish the suffering and tragedy of between 3 and 7 billion people dying, of climate change wreaking harm for thousands of years, and the loss of much of the amazing scientific understanding we have of the world since so much of it is being preserved digitally instead of on a more permanent physical substance (i.e. imprinted on thin metal sheets, etc.).

Even though even a small nuclear war would kill over 1 billion people, and a nuclear EMP even more, the ozone would recover after 5 years, many people around the equator will be fine, others will have stockpiled enough food to get by.

All of the 9 planetary boundaries will diminish as human population declines from lack of fossil fuels. Peak phosphorous will come even sooner without fossil-fuel driven vehicles and equipment to harvest and transport it.

This is too big a topic to list every factor and how it might turn out as you can see from the menu items in Decline and Collapse at [energyskeptic.com](http://energyskeptic.com). Yes, extinction is a possibility if too many of these happen at once over just a few centuries.

But since both human population and energy resources are likely to decline exponentially rather quickly, we won't be able to do the harm we are now, to the planet or ourselves, and that has a good chance of saving us from extinction.

\* \* \* \* \*

## References

Hart, Phil. 15 Nov 2010. Oil Demand to Decline in the West, according to International Energy Agency, on The Oil Drum

Heinberg, R., Fridley, D. The end of cheap coal. New forecasts suggest that coal reserves will run out faster than many believe. Nature 468, 367-369 (18 November 2010) doi:10.1038/468367a

Höök, M., Sivertsson, A. & Aleklett, K. "Validity of the fossil fuel production outlooks in the IPCC Emission Scenarios" Natural Resources Research, 2010, Vol. 19, Issue 2: 63-81

Nel and Cooper (2009) Implications of fossil fuel constraints on economic growth and global warming, Energy Policy 37: 166-180.

Patzek, T, Croft, G. A global coal production forecast with multi-Hubbert cycle analysis. Energy 35 (2010) 3109e3122

New York Times: "shale gas drilling is a Ponzi scheme" Leaked Industry E-Mails and Reports on natural gas supply.

Alice Friedmann published the above article on her website Energy Skeptic on May 3, 2013. She has had several articles on Culture Change and the Sail Transport Network websites.