“Urban Sprawl” – from City Sidewalks.net

Purpose
This article describes the origins and environmental impacts of urban sprawl.

Overview
Students will read the article titled, “Urban Sprawl” from CitySidewalks.net. This article explains how urban sprawl first began after World War II as people moved from city centers to surrounding lands. It also details the environmental costs of urban sprawl, such as pollution, fragmentation of wildlife habitat, and disruption of the natural water cycle via increased surface runoff.

Student Outcomes
• Students will understand the causes and consequences of urban sprawl.

Time
Less than one 50-minute class period

Level
Secondary earth/environmental science (9-12)

Materials and Tools
Copies of article with questions – 1 per student

Preparation
Copy article and reading questions for each student

Prerequisites
N/A

Background
Students will need to have a grade 9-10 reading level.
**Answer Key**

**Q1.** In your own words, write a definition of the term “urban sprawl.” What are some common characteristics?

*Student answers should contain some of the following characteristics:*

- Widespread, low-density development not typically on a grid or planned with space efficiency in mind
- Strip malls, large office buildings
- Housing subdivisions with homes of a specific price range on wide, new roads
- Residents dependent on cars for transportation instead of walking or public transit

**Q2.** Name three causes of urban sprawl.

*Student answers should include 3 of the following:*

- The GI Bill after World War 2
- Increased road building
- Increased automobile manufacturing
- Inexpensive land, and federal subsidies for commercial development and highway construction
- Ineffective or nonexistent land use planning

**Q3.** Describe four ways that urban sprawl negatively impacts the environment.

- Habitat fragmentation due to construction of subdivisions, commercial developments, roads
- Damage to or loss of wetlands
- Air pollution from cars
- Water pollution from surface runoff over highways and parking lots that picks up contaminants and deposits them in local waterways
- Increased competition for resources among surviving wildlife as habitat and other resources are diminished or lost entirely