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Respect for the environment is necessary

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Whether climate change is real or not, whether it is the result of human activity or not, one cannot deny that our environment is changing and not necessarily for the good.

I just finished reading a recent Associated Press article that references the problems that the Marshall Islands are having with rising sea levels. While visiting these islands, an oceanographer with the U.S. Geological Survey stated that “the future does not look good for a lot of these islands.”

His concern has to do with the islands being regularly swamped by rising seas within a couple of decades as a result of climate change. We can argue what the cause of climate change may be, but we can't argue that the seas are in fact rising and people are already experiencing catastrophic changes in their lives.

I also recently read about a study of the St. Matthew's Island, Alaska, reindeer population. Reindeer were introduced on the island in 1944. By 1957, the original population of 29 had increased to 1,350 — and by 1963, 6,000.

Interestingly, three years later the reindeer population was down to 42. Why? The reindeer had no natural predators on the island, but their population experienced unchecked and exponential growth.

This is an excellent illustration of how any living thing must live within its environmental carrying capacity. Carrying capacity is the population that can be sustained with availability of food and water and not be stressed due to overcrowding which can result in disease and lack of reproductive vigor.

When a population exceeds the environmental carrying capacity, it collapses. If you plot the reindeer growth curve and compare it to the human population growth, there is a remarkable and chilling similarity.

We are certainly not reindeer, but there is conflict around the world that can be traced back to availability of resources, whether it be food, petroleum or water. Water will be the new “oil” for which conflicts will erupt.

We are already seeing new diseases emerge as our climate warms and global travel enables diseases to spread more easily; think of the Zika virus.

Why are these two illustrations important to you as a resident of Joint Base Lewis-McChord and the Pacific Northwest?

First, as you can see, the environment can cause catastrophic events, with or without our help. We must respect our environment. Second, as the reindeer study shows, our environment (Earth) has only a finite amount of resources.

If we exceed it, the population starts to collapse. Therefore, we must all do our part to save these resources, even in very small ways.

Here are a few tips and facts I found that can help everyone to do their part in saving our natural resources.

- Recycle. If you live on JBLM, check with Lewis-McChord Communities for your days for pickup, or if living off of JBLM, check with your city. If you live in the barracks or dorm, there are recycle containers within walking distance.

Americans throw away enough aluminum to rebuild our entire commercial air fleet every three months.

American businesses discard enough office paper each year to build a 12-foot wall from New York to JBLM, each year. A three-foot high stack of recycled paper saves one tree.

Americans throw away 2.5 million plastic bottles away — every hour. The energy saved by recycling one ton of plastic bottles can power a household for two people all year.

- Conserve Energy. The utility bill for the “city” of JBLM for fiscal 2016 was approximately \$26 million. That’s more than \$70,000 per day.

If you saved only 5 percent of your energy use every day, we could save \$1.3 million each year that the Department of Defense could put into the operational budgets of the services.

Purchase Energy Star appliances at home and at work. When you shop for appliances, there is usually a “you save this amount of money annually” on the appliance.

This may add up to several hundred dollars per year for each appliance.

Purchase LED lights. They save up to 75 percent of energy over incandescent lights and last 10 times longer.

JBLM is in the middle of a very large phased project of replacing all outside lighting to LED. The economic study for this project estimated that JBLM will save thousands of dollars per year.

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