

Urban Sprawl in the United States

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we will cover the topic of urban sprawl. Urban sprawl is the expansion of urban areas into undeveloped or agricultural land. We will discuss the historical change in land use in the United States in relation to urban sprawl. We will also explore the impacts and consequences of urban sprawl, as well as a historical example. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. History of Urban Sprawl in the United States

In the early 1900s, before automobiles became widely used and shaped policies and regulations, the different ways of land use were more integrated and less defined by car and truck transportation.

After the economic explosion following World War II in the 1940s, middle and upper classes in the United States began moving to the suburbs on the outskirts of cities to find more affordable housing. This process of moving to the suburbs continued and grew after the Vietnam War as well, and the transition was facilitated by government subsidies on roads and gasoline.



By the 1970s, the federal government began taking charge of several national environmental issues. However, the issue of land use remained largely in the hands of local governments.

In the 1990s, concerns about urban sprawl issues increased, largely due to the abandonment of certain inner-city areas. This was compounded by Vice President Al Gore's interest and awareness of urban sprawl problems.

2. Impacts of Urban Sprawl

One of the impacts of urban sprawl is the loss of agriculture land. Urban sprawl consumes more than one million acres per year, or two acres per minute.

Urban sprawl also takes a toll on air quality, because it requires that more vehicle miles be traveled to get to work or other locations, while limiting public transport and the ability to bike or walk. This results in increased emissions of gases, such as nitrogen oxides and ground-level ozone. Further, with more time spent in cars, people are more exposed to potential carcinogens present in vehicles.

Habitat fragmentation can also result from urban sprawl and has a number of negative effects, such as the following:

- Threatens species
- Reduces biodiversity
- Increases potential for infectious diseases

- Increases watershed pollution from impervious surfaces



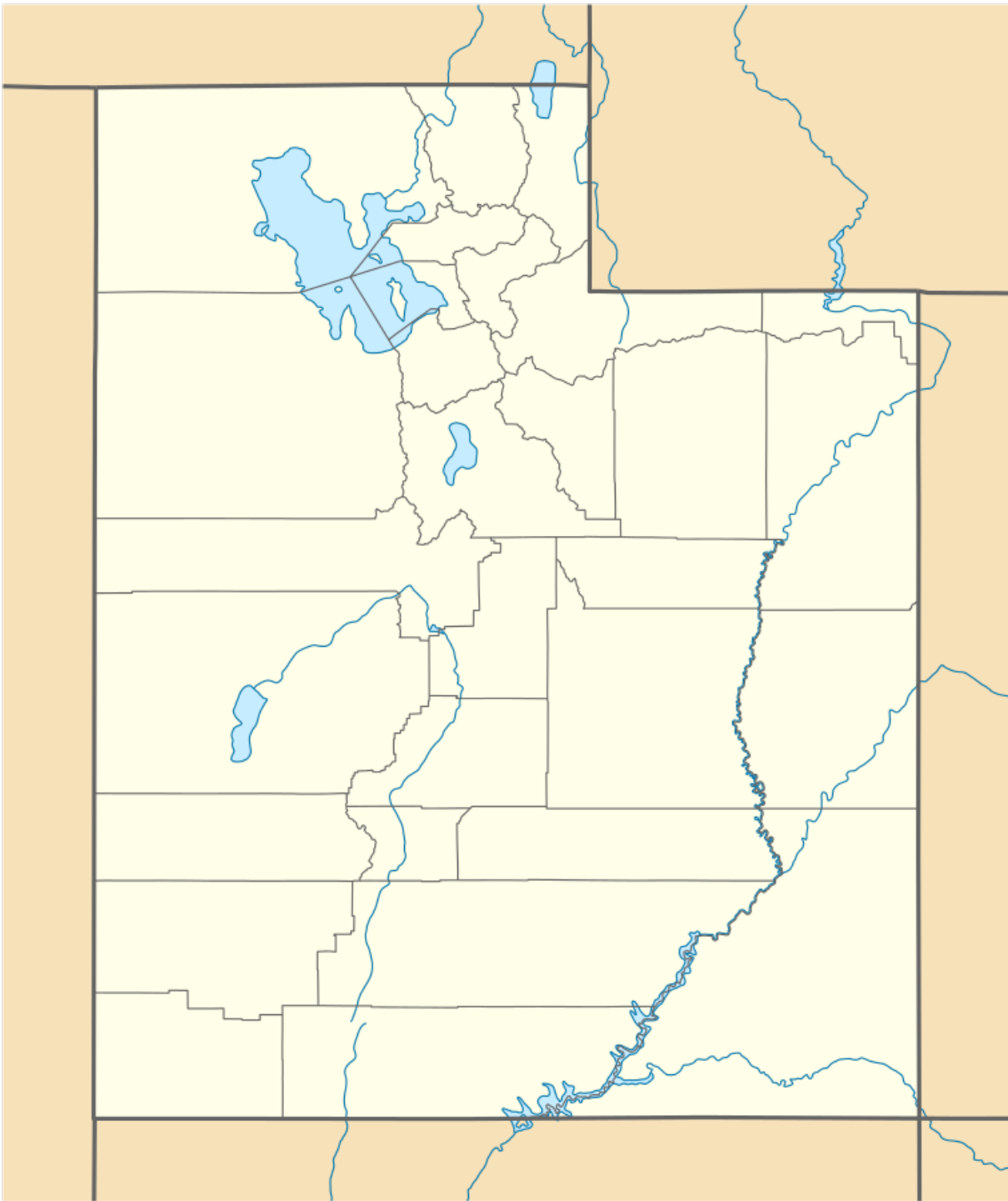
Low population density only encourages and increases these impacts, because it requires that more land be developed.

The following table has a list of some additional by-products of urban sprawl.

By-Product of Urban Sprawl	Reason/Related Effect
Loss of farmland	It decreases the diversity in food and increases costs.
Decreased social equity	Poverty is concentrated in urban areas.
Increased crime	Crime rates are higher in inner-city areas that are now abandoned and underpopulated.
Decreased walkability of cities	Obesity and health problems increase.
Increased dependence on foreign fuels	More fuel is needed to travel the extra miles in vehicles.
Decreased civic engagement	Populations are spread out and isolated from each other.

3. Historical Example of Urban Sprawl: Utah

A historical example is the urban sprawl in the state of Utah. Utah, as of 2014, had the second fastest urban sprawl growth rate in the United States. Utah's zoning laws encourage designated zones for development that facilitate urban sprawl. Between 2002 and 2010, urban expansion grew by 17.6%, consuming 203 square miles of agricultural or undeveloped land.



Across the country, in that same time period, 13,000 square miles—or an area larger than the state of Maryland—underwent the same transition.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, we learned about the **history of urban sprawl in the United States**, which is the expansion of urban areas into undeveloped or agricultural land. We learned about its **impacts** and additional consequences. We discussed the real-world **historical example of urban sprawl in Utah**, which had the second fastest urban growth rate in the country.

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