


GLOBAL WILDERNESS – TIMELINE SINCE THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Pre-Industrial Baseline (~1700)

- Estimated **~50–60% of Earth's land** remained largely wild or minimally modified
- Human population: ~600 million
- Industrial infrastructure: minimal

 This is effectively the last time wilderness dominated the Earth system (in a functional sense, even if not pristine everywhere)

Early Industrial Period (1700–1900)

- Expansion of agriculture, logging, early industry
- Wilderness declines but still dominant in many regions

Estimated wilderness remaining:

- **~40–50% of land**

 Key shift:


Land begins transitioning from **ecosystem** → **production**

Mid-20th Century (1900–1950)

- Rapid industrialisation
- Mechanised agriculture
- Global population doubles

Estimated wilderness remaining:

- **~35–40%**

 Turning point:

Human systems begin to **reshape planetary systems**

Late 20th Century (1950–1990)

- Roads, dams, global trade, industrial fishing
- Massive acceleration of land conversion

Estimated wilderness remaining:

- ~25–30%

👉 This is where wilderness becomes **fragmented rather than continuous**

Modern Era (1990s–2020s)

Key global figures:

- ~23% of Earth's land surface now classified as wilderness
- ~20% of land (~30 million km²) identified as intact wilderness in major global studies
- ~10% of wilderness lost since the 1990s alone

Oceans:

- Only ~13% of oceans remain free from intense human activity

👉 This is the critical insight:

Wilderness is no longer dominant — it is now **residual**

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT (2020s)

- ~77% of land modified by humans
- ~87% of oceans impacted
- 70% of remaining wilderness concentrated in just 5 countries

👉 Countries where remaining wilderness is concentrated:

- Russia
- Canada
- **Australia**
- Brazil
- United States

CONTINENTAL BREAKDOWN (APPROXIMATE PATTERNS)

(Based on global wilderness mapping studies — Watson, Venter et al.)

North America

- **High wilderness remaining (~40–50% in Canada/Alaska regions)**
- Large intact:
 - Boreal forests
 - Arctic tundra

 One of the **last strongholds of wilderness**

South America


- Amazon historically vast wilderness
- **~30% wilderness loss since 1990s in key regions**

 Rapid decline due to:

- Logging
- Agriculture
- Roads

Africa

- Significant wilderness remains (Central Africa, Sahara)
- **~14% loss since 1990s**

 Increasing pressure:

- Population growth
- Resource extraction

Asia

- **Lowest remaining wilderness proportion**
- High population + long history of land use

Remaining wilderness mainly in:

- Siberia
- Tibetan Plateau

Australia

- Among the **highest wilderness retention globally**
- Large intact areas:
 - Outback
 - Northern savannas
 - Deserts

👉 Australia is globally recognised as a **major wilderness reservoir**

Polar Regions (Antarctica & Arctic)

- **Highest wilderness integrity on Earth**
- Minimal direct human modification

👉 These are effectively the **last near-complete wilderness systems**

Then vs Now:

Time	Approx. Wilderness (%)
~1700	50–60%
1900	40–50%
1950	35–40%
1990	25–30%
2020s	~20–23%

CRITICAL INSIGHT

Over ~300 years, humanity has reduced wilderness from a **dominant planetary condition** → a **minority remnant**

And more importantly:

Wilderness loss is **accelerating, not stabilising**

THE FATE OF THE WILDERNESS

“Within a few centuries, the Earth has shifted from a world shaped by wilderness to a world where wilderness survives only in fragments — a fragile, threatened remainder of what once was whole; a whisper of wild nature, a bare reminder of the earth, oceans and atmosphere that once was.”