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Sustainable population celebration in Burlington Rally at Oakledge Park addresses need to slow growth and help the planet.

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by Matt Ryan
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To celebrate Vermont's declining population, about 20 people threw a party Saturday at Burlington's Oakledge Park.

Someone brought apple cider. Another person brought some free literature. Jerry Karnas, population director at the Center for Biological Diversity, brought a box of condoms. They came packaged in catchy slogans that encouraged people to cut back on unintended pregnancies to give wildlife more room to procreate.

For instance, "Wrap with care, save the polar bear."

The tongue-in-cheekiness of the gathering belied the dire consequences of overpopulation, domestic and abroad, that the Vermonters for a Sustainable Population had come to address.

Continual population growth, year over year, century over century, is ultimately



Free condoms were available at the Vermonters for Sustainable Population celebration at Oakledge Park. / MADDIE MC-GARVEY/FREE PRESS

unsustainable, they noted, given planet Earth's finite resources and real estate.

And although Vermont's population fell by 581 people from 2011 to 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the state's "sustainable" population is likely nearer to 450,000 than the current 626,000, said to George Plumb, the group's secretary and treasurer.

Plumb said the group expects to finish crunching the numbers and send a report to the state's elected officials within a few weeks.

"We're writing a study on 11 different indicators, and each indicator will determine the optimal, or sustainable, population size of Vermont," Plumb said.

The indicators, he said, range from a population's ecological impact, to that population's degree of democratic representation, to the numbers needed to support a "steady-state economy."

"I'm sure it's going to be controversial, and people are going to say, 'Oh you're nuts, we need to keep on adding more housing,'" Plumb said. "At least we'll get a figure out there finally on what is a sustainable population size for the state."

But before you get too excited, consider that in the year Vermont's population declined by 581 people, New Hampshire, to pick a state, grew by five times that number. Texas grew by 425,417 people.

The United States' population on the whole, again, according to census estimates, grew by more than 2.3 million people