

The current human population is 8.1 billion people. Now, imagine if there were only 10 humans left on the planet, and we were all rapidly going extinct. For a porpoise in the Gulf of California, this is the reality. There are only 10 vaquita porpoises left and before we know it, there will be none left. The Gulf of California is home to about 890 fish species and about a third of the Earth's cetacean species. The vaquita is the most endangered porpoise on Earth and is the smallest one too. The species is susceptible to being killed and suffocated by fishing nets due to its small size. The nets are set for another endangered species, the totoaba. The totoaba is only found in the Gulf of California and is caught illegally for its swim bladders. The bladders sell for thousands of dollars in Asia, and are used to make a medicinal soup, and the high demand is leading to an increase in nets. In 2015, Mexico declared a ban on the nets to protect the vaquita. Unfortunately, due to the isolation of the Gulf it has been challenging for police to catch drug cartels trading the totoabas. If the US and Mexico do not act soon, the vaquita could be just another, sadly, extinct species which we read about but will never see in the wild. In my childhood, I, like many children, loved dolphins, the ocean, and marine life. I dreamed of one day seeing a manatee or seeing dolphins and whales at sea. I can now say that I have seen a pod of dolphins in the ocean. As I grew, this fascination has grown into an urge to protect these smart and majestic creatures. When I was 10, I wanted to be a marine biologist. Now, as a senior in high school, I want to save these creatures, their home, and our planet. Generations after mine deserve the chance to see unique creatures like the vaquita and the totoaba. My current dream is to major in Environmental Science and to work in marine conservation. The vaquita deserves as much protection as any other cetacean or animal out there. Imagine that you were one of the last humans and wondered what Earth would become once you went extinct. Well, yes the Gulf of California will go on as an ecosystem, but the vaquita will be absent and there will be a rift in the

ecosystem. The sharks will have no prey and the populations of squid, smaller fish, and crustaceans will skyrocket out of control. So, saving them protects them and their ecosystem for generations to come. Imagine swimming along and all the sudden being trapped, suffocating to death, because you accidentally swam into a fishing net. So, if you want to save not just the vaquitas but the Gulf of California, take action today!