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## Environmental Policy in the 1990s

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Environmental Policy in the 1990s*  
Norman J. Vig and Michael E. Kraft, editors  
Washington, D.C.: CQ Press  
1990 Pp. xiv, 418.

The field of environmental policy has undergone rapid development since the early 1970s, and the pace of this development shows no sign of slowing. It is now commonly asserted that the environmental challenges facing our time are of a different magnitude and type than those which sparked the major legislation of two decades ago. Pollution and human health effects were the dominant focus of legislation then, although not necessarily of the entire environmental movement. As these statutes were implemented, the costs of regulatory controls and the appealing alternatives of pollution prevention and the new market approaches to preventing pollution began to receive the attention of policymakers.

Rather suddenly, the complex issues raised by global climate change and preserving biodiversity have moved onto center stage. We must now address, on a global level, how staggering increases in population and consumption are affecting the environment and what policies will work in the face of these dynamics.

*Environmental Policy in the 1990s* is a hearty collection of essays addressing both the familiar and this new generation of environmental policies. The editors arranged the articles in a workable progression. They begin with a reprise of recent environmental policies and the underlying political dimensions of these policies, followed by a discussion of what they describe as "intractable policy dilemmas" that have dominated recent debate. A series of articles examines the role of the courts and mediation in dispute resolution, and the difficulties of comprehensive decision-making. Three articles describe global environmental pressures. The book closes with two provocative articles on the fundamental values that environmental problems raise and a conclusion by the editors.

In reaching to anticipate the environmental policies of the future, the authors impose upon the limits of our capabilities, yet in a way that is intriguing for the reader. The growing scientific understanding of the environment has resulted in the identification of major global problems, along, of course, with the far from solved "old" problems, the political response to these problems is in critical need of understanding, but the dynamics of global environmental politics are even less well understood

than those of United States environmental politics. (Even discussion of United States politics is quickly dated; the year in which the Earth was on Time magazine's cover seems remote after an intervening period of overshadowing political developments.) And, most importantly, environmental issues are inextricably intertwined with all the other issues that policymakers confront, so that "in a nontrivial way, all problems are environmental problems." (Bartlett, *Comprehensive Environmental Decision Making: Can It Work?* at 248)

If all issues are interrelated with environmental issues, then economic growth, international conflicts, and other controlling forces will be significant determinants of the world's environmental future. It is not surprising that the conversion of market economies, wars in the oil fields of the Middle East, and political relations among countries in a common river basin will fundamentally affect the environment. Further, the nature of these factors makes it difficult to predict either physical trends or policy responses. Perhaps as a result, the essays on international/environmental policies were more tentative and less firmly anchored than, for example, the essay examining environmental policy among the different states of the United States.

What one can credibly do in writing in advance of the next decade is limited, but readers of this book will be directed to the right issues and given thoughtful materials to consider. It should have special appeal to teachers of environmental studies and environmental policies, because of the important subjects treated by the chapters and because there are implicit disagreements among authors, providing opportunities for critical reading and discussion. The authors come from a variety of disciplines and address their articles to a general readership, yet their reference lists are treasure troves for an academic reader.

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