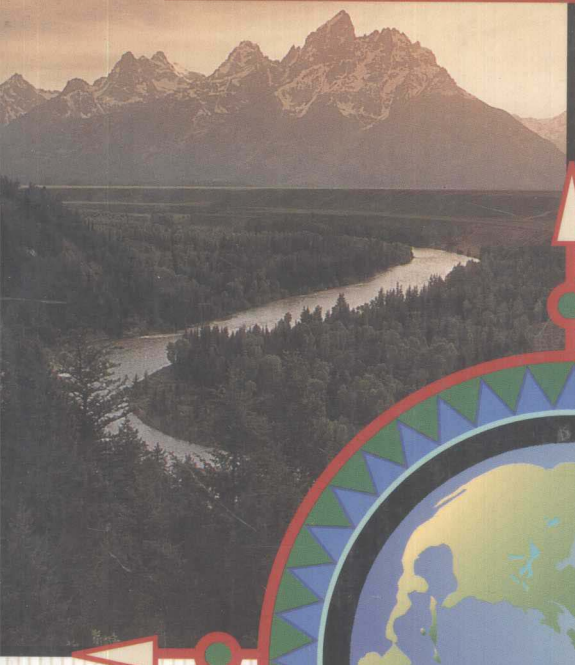
Environmental Policy and Politics



Michael E. Kraft

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Environmental Policy and Politics

Toward the Twenty-First Century

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–GREEN BAY

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Environmental Policy and Politics

FOREWORD

This volume is the second in the HarperCollins Public Policy Series, studies of significant domestic policy issues facing the American people as we move into the twenty-first century. Designed both to complement public policy textbooks for advanced undergraduates and graduate students and to provide a resource for specialists, each of these brief works provides a comprehensive, coherent, scholarly account of the development of a particular substantive policy domain. In doing so these books offer a historical review of policy development in a given domain as well as an analysis and evaluation of current efforts to deal with key problems.

Unlike much of the writing in the field of policy studies, the books in this series are more concerned with the ideas that lie behind policy and their implementation than with issues of political process. Providing an account of the drama of congressional give-and-take in passing the Food Stamp program, for example, or of interest group strategic considerations in tax reform politics is less important here than the exploration of the sources and substance of competing definitions of problems and the resulting programs that emerge. These books, in short, immerse us more in the substance of public policy than the politics that surround its creation.

Thus, the meat of public policy in this series is conceived as a set of government objectives and programmatic initiatives that evolve over time. Rest assured this series does not and cannot ignore politics. Any public policy undergoes an evolution driven by shifting definitions of the problem which programs or government positions attempt to address, by changing political and economic considerations, and by the learning experiences gained through the implementation process. These elements, of course, are all contested in the political arena. It is clearly essential to understand the array of actors and interests involved in this competition. Furthermore, it is important to take account of the structure of public opinion, which provides a matrix in which contests over problem definitions and solutions occur. Thus, although the books in this series are principally concerned with definitions, programs, and implementation, they are at the same time attentive to the need to establish the political context in which substantive policy initiatives are developed and later modified or abandoned.

Public problems are, of course, rarely solved. Drug use, poverty, environmental degradation, and inadequate housing are perennial issues. Not only is our social technology often inadequate to eliminate social and economic problems (in contrast, say, to our ability to eliminate polio with scientific technology), but we must make choices about how to allocate our resources. There is always a question, then, of what remains to be done. Each book in this series not only looks backward, examining history as a way of understanding where we are at the present, but also forward

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to the policy challenges that face us at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What advances in knowledge must we make to address a particular public problem more successfully? Must we shift our definition of what the problem is? Are our approaches to problem solution evolving in ways different from the past? What changes in the political and social landscape will bear on the policy domain in question in the future? To confront these questions armed with the benefits of historical perspective is perhaps to be as well prepared for what lies ahead as we can be.

Peter Eisinger, Series Editor
La Follette Institute of Public Affairs
University of Wisconsin

PREFACE

Environmental policy is at a critical crossroads. Since the dawn of the modern environmental era in the late 1960s, public concern and the actions of environmental groups have transformed public policy. The U.S. Congress has enacted dozens of major environmental protection and natural resource policies, as have state and local governments. Environmental issues have entered the mainstream of U.S. politics, as they have in the international arena. Yet, future achievements are not guaranteed at a time when concern over the costs and burdens of implementing those policies dominate public discourse and a political backlash against environmental interests in the United States gathers momentum.

Success over the next decade depends on our ability to stimulate a constructive public dialogue on environmental policy and politics. More than ever, we need to learn what works and what does not and to employ that knowledge to redesign environmental policies for the next generation. Those policies and the political strategies used to advance them must command broad public support and be consistent with the scarce fiscal resources that constrain all public policies in the 1990s. The tasks go beyond setting budgetary priorities and fine-tuning policies dealing with clean air and water, toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes, and protection of natural resources such as wilderness areas and national parks. They involve building the political and institutional capacities for democratic governance of environmental issues in the twenty-first century.

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) highlighted a new array of daunting challenges that all nations face. They must learn how to respond creatively and effectively to the risks of global climate change, depletion of the ozone layer, destruction of forests and soils, loss of biological diversity, and a surging human population. No responsibility of government and society over the next generation will be more difficult than accommodating the level of economic development needed to meet human needs and aspirations while averting devastating impacts on the environment that sustains life.

Within industrialized nations like the United States, this new environmental agenda makes clear the imperative of integrating environmental protection with other social and economic activities, from energy use and transportation to agriculture and urban planning. We can no longer afford to think of environmental policy as an isolated and largely remedial activity of cleaning up the residue of society's careless and wasteful habits. Emphasis must be placed on prevention of future harm through redesign of economic activities around the concept of sustainable development.

These new needs also require that governments work closely with the private sector in partnerships that can spur technological innovations while avoiding the protracted conflicts and program delays that have constrained environmental policy achievements over much of the past 25 years. None of this means that tough regulation should be abandoned when it is necessary to achieve environmental goals. It does signal, however, the need to supplement regulation with other strategies and policy tools, such as market-based incentives and public education, that promise to speed the realization of those goals or significantly lower the costs of getting there.

Whether governments and other organizations succeed in resolving environmental problems of the 1990s and twenty-first century ultimately depends on public understanding, support, and activism. Environmental policies will require significant social and behavioral changes that will be possible only if people educate themselves about the issues and work cooperatively for environmental sustainability. Survey data confirm a high level of public concern about the environment within the United States and globally. The proliferation of thousands of grassroots organizations worldwide testifies to the public's eagerness to end environmental degradation and protect their communities. At the same time, the impact of environmental and resource policies has spurred the rise of antienvironmental organizations that have displayed considerable political influence. To be effective over the next several decades, environmentalists will need to hone their political skills and forge broader alliances with new constituencies around common interests in environmental sustainability.

This book seeks to contribute to these developments by offering a succinct overview and assessment of U.S. environmental policy and politics in the mid-1990s. It differs from other texts in several respects. It uses a risk-based framework for environmental policy analysis to encourage students to judge for themselves the significance of environmental conditions and trends and the often disputed evidence of the human and ecological risks they pose. It summarizes an extensive collection of scientific studies, government reports, and policy analyses to convey the nature of environmental problems, their causes, progress in dealing with them, and policy implications. The problems covered include global threats such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and population growth as well as more conventional topics such as air and water pollution, toxic chemicals, hazardous wastes, and energy use.

The text also describes major U.S. environmental and natural resource policies, their origins, the key policy actors who shape them, their achievements and deficiencies, and the latest proposals for policy change. It offers a thorough, yet concise, coverage of the U.S. policy-making process, the legislative and administrative settings for policy decisions, and the role of environmental groups and public opinion in environmental politics. It gives special attention to recent debates over environmental costs, benefits, and risks, and the economic impacts of environmental policies. It covers developments in the Clinton administration through early 1995.

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of environmental policy and places it within late twentieth century political and economic trends that affect it. It also sets out an analytic framework drawn from policy analysis and environmental science that helps to connect environmental policy to the political process. Chapter 2 reviews current

knowledge on the state of the environment and serves as a brief description of the environmental problems that governments and others confront in the 1990s.

Chapter 3 has two related purposes. It surveys the characteristics of U.S. government and politics and the policy-making process, with special attention to agenda setting. It then uses those concepts to trace the evolution of environmental policy and politics from the earliest days of the nation through the emergence of the modern environmental movement and reactions to it. The public's concern over the environment and its support for public policy actions are given special treatment.

The heart of the book, Chapters 4 and 5, turns to the substance of U.S. environmental and natural resource policies. Chapter 4 discusses the major environmental protection, or pollution control, statutes administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and their continuing evolution. It also assesses the EPA, its capacity for implementing those policies, its working relationships with the states, and the processes of environmental standard setting and rule making. Chapter 5 offers comparable coverage of energy and natural resource policies. It outlines the history of efforts to design national energy policies, including the Bush administration's National Energy Strategy and Clinton administration initiatives. It describes conflicts between natural resource preservation and economic development, and puts Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt's natural resource agenda within the broader context of environmentalist challenges to long-dominant natural resource interests.

Chapter 6 focuses on environmental policy evaluation. It takes a broader look at signs of progress or lack of it in achieving the goals of environmental protection and natural resource policies, and reiterates the major critiques of U.S. environmental policy in the mid-1990s. It appraises the national debate over costs and benefits of environmental policies, risk assessment, and implications of environmental policy for jobs and the economy. It also evaluates widely discussed alternatives to environmental regulation, including market incentives and privatization.

Finally, Chapter 7 looks to the future. It describes the remaining policy agenda for the 1990s, including reforms of environmental policies and institutions and issues of environmental justice. It also explores the goal of sustainable development that will shape twenty-first century environmental policy, with particular attention to policy needs in the areas of energy, population, biodiversity, environmental research, and international environmental protection. It concludes with an overview of business and the environment and the potential for democratic politics in shaping policy choices.

The book presents considerable technical material on environmental problems and public policies. I have tried to make it all as current as possible and faithful to the scientific literature. If in some instances I have fallen short of those goals, I hope readers will alert me to important omissions, misinterpretations, and other deficiencies.

In preparing a book manuscript one incurs many debts. The University of Wisconsin provided me with a year's sabbatical in 1993–1994 that was invaluable for the completion of the book. The Green Bay campus and its Department of Public and Environmental Affairs supplied me with essential office support and the tech-

nologies on which we all depend today: computers, printers, fax and copying machines, telephones, and an Internet connection. Karen Katers and Beverly Harvey assisted in innumerable ways to ensure the smooth functioning of the office that moved the project along. The organization of the book and its content have been shaped by my teaching at UW–Green Bay. I owe much to my undergraduate and graduate students whose interest in environmental policy and politics gave me the opportunity to discuss these issues at length with concerned and attentive people and to learn from them.

I have benefitted immeasurably from the individuals whose analyses of environmental politics and policy, and U.S. government and politics more broadly, make a book like this possible. Their work tells us much about how governments have responded to the environmental challenge, why they have chosen the policy approaches they have, and what difference it makes. That made my job easier. I hope the extensive references in the text adequately convey my reliance on their scholarship and my gratitude to them.

Special thanks go to my colleagues Denise Scheberle and Scott Furlong for reading the draft manuscript and counseling me in their areas of expertise. Gerrit Knaap, at the University of Illinois, was kind enough to read Chapter 6 and advise me on matters of environmental economics. Robert Bartlett of Purdue University offered many helpful suggestions on the draft manuscript. Terry Boyd and Sandra Simpson read parts of the manuscript and assisted with the index. I thank the anonymous reviewers for HarperCollins as well. They recommended a variety of changes to make the text more accessible to students. I also appreciate the splendid work of the editorial and design team at York Production Services: Tracey Topper, Candice Carta, Susan Free, and Stephanie Magean. I am particularly grateful to Norman Vig for his comments on the manuscript. This volume was stimulated and nurtured by our work in co-editing four books on environment politics, technology, and public policy. Naturally, I assume responsibility for any errors in the text that remain.

Readers will detect in these pages a tone of modest optimism often absent from works on environmental problems and public policy. It is there because I believe people have a great capacity to understand their predicament and devise solutions to it if given the right opportunities. Eric Morley, the son of my good friends Jim and Cathy Morley, inspires that confidence. So does his generation. My students encourage the same conviction, and they are smart enough to recognize the special knowledge and skills they need to work effectively on environmental problems.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Louis and Pearl Kraft. Their compassion, generosity, and caring for their fellow human beings embodied the social concerns that today are reflected in an environmental ethic. They also provided me and my brothers with the opportunity to grow up in a stunning environment in Southern California and experience the wonders of the desert, mountains, and ocean that exist in such close proximity in that part of country.

Michael E. Kraft

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CHAPTER ONE

Environmental Problems and Politics in the 1990s

The approach of the twenty-first century should stimulate deep reflection on the human condition and the state of the environment in which we live. Viewed from the mid-1990s, there is abundant cause for concern. Environmental threats are more pervasive and ominous than they were at the dawn of the modern environmental movement nearly three decades ago. The problems are familiar enough: air and water pollution, toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes, destruction of ecologically critical lands and forests, loss of wilderness and wildlife, possibly severe climate changes, and poverty and deterioration of the quality of life in increasingly congested cities. Reports on these developments fill the airwaves and newspapers, and provoke public apprehension over unceasing environmental degradation. Individuals also can see the evidence for themselves in their neighborhoods, communities, and regions, and it clearly affects them. In the United States and worldwide, people believe the environment is in serious decline and they strongly support efforts to reverse the trend. Their fears are shared by many of the world's policy makers, who helped set the agenda for the historic Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 in Río de Janeiro.

The Earth Summit was the largest international diplomatic conference ever held, attracting representatives from 179 nations (including 118 heads of state). More than 8000 journalists covered the event. In addition, representatives from more than 7000 nongovernmental organizations attended a concurrent '92 Global Forum at a nearby site in Río. In the presummit planning sessions and at the conference itself, there was a palpable sense of urgency over worsening environmental problems and their implications for economic development, especially in poor nations. There was also much evidence of public determination to deal with the problems. In a postsummit UN publication containing the conference's Agenda 21 action program, the meeting's organizer Maurice Strong spoke optimistically about what he termed "a wildfire of interest and support" that the Earth Summit had ignited throughout the world

and that he hoped would stimulate a global movement toward sustainable paths of development (United Nations 1993, 1). Five years earlier, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (1987), had similar effects. It sold 1 million copies in 30 languages and spurred extensive policy changes in governments and the private sector (Starke 1990).

If it achieved nothing else, the Earth Summit could be called a great success for giving form and substance to the concept of sustainable development. One prominent report released a year before the summit made the need for sustainable development clear:

> Since 1900, the world's population has multiplied more than three times. Its economy has grown twentyfold. The consumption of fossil fuels has grown by a factor of 30, and industrial production by a factor of 50. Most of that growth, about four-fifths of it, has occurred since 1950. Much of it is unsustainable. Earth's basic life-supporting capital of forests, species, and soils is being depleted and its fresh waters and oceans are being degraded at an accelerating rate (MacNeill, Winsemius, and Yakushiji 1991, 3).

The authors looked back to social and economic changes in the twentieth century. What lies ahead in the twenty-first century is equally striking and worrisome. The world's 1994 population of 5.6 billion people is projected to grow to between 8 and 10 billion by 2050, with 95 percent of that growth occurring in the developing nations. To feed, house, and otherwise provide for people's needs and aspirations will tax natural resources and ecological systems throughout the world. Some estimates indicate that if current forms of development continue, the world could see a five- to tenfold increase in economic activity over the next 50 years (MacNeill, Winsemius, and Yakushiji 1991). Economic activity within the United States alone may quadruple in that same time period (National Commission on the Environment 1993, xiii).

Will the Earth be able to accommodate this kind of growth, and if so, at what human and ecological cost? How well equipped are the world's nations to respond to the needs created by such demographic, economic, and environmental trends? Will political systems prove able and willing to design and implement policies that can minimize the negative impacts of economic activities on human and ecological health and establish sustainable patterns of resource use? This book concentrates on the last of these questions, although it also addresses the first two. It is about the relationship of environmental policy to politics, and it argues that a democratic environmental politics is essential to the development of effective public policy. I focus on the U.S. federal government but give some attention to policy developments at the state and local level and to international trends affecting U.S. policy.

Environmental Policy and Politics

Politics is about social choices. It concerns policy goals and tools, and the way we organize and govern ourselves. Developments of the last several decades and projections of what is coming in the next century make it clear that the United States and other nations face important decisions about their futures. They can maintain current

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