

Environmental Policy

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Tenth Edition

Edited by

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Contents

[Preface](#)

[About the Editors](#)

[About the Contributors](#)

[Part I. Environmental Policy and Politics in Transition](#)

[1. U.S. Environmental Policy: Achievements and New Directions](#)

[2. Racing to the Top, the Bottom, or the Middle of the Pack? The Evolving State Government Role in Environmental Protection](#)

[3. Environmental Advocacy at the Dawn of the Trump Era: Assessing Strategies for the Preservation of Progress](#)

[Part II. Federal Institutions and Policy Change](#)

[4. Presidential Powers and Environmental Policy](#)

[5. Environmental Policy in Congress](#)

[6. Environmental Policy in the Courts](#)

[7. The Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[Part III. Public Policy Dilemmas](#)

[8. Energy Policy: Fracking, Coal, and the Water-Energy Nexus](#)

[9. Eating and the Environment: Ecological Tensions in Food Production](#)

[10. Applying Market Principles to Environmental Policy](#)

[11. Toward Sustainable Production: Finding Workable Strategies for Government and Industry](#)

[12. Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously: What Cities Are Doing](#)

[Part IV. Global Issues and Controversies](#)

[13. Global Climate Change Governance: Where to Go After Paris?](#)

[14. Environment, Population, and the Developing World](#)

[Part V. Conclusion](#)

[15. Conclusion: Past and Future Environmental Challenges](#)

[Appendices](#)

[Appendix 1. Major Federal Laws on the Environment, 1969–2017](#)

[Appendix 2. Budgets of Selected Environmental and Natural Resource Agencies, 1980–2017](#)

[Appendix 3. Employees in Selected Federal Agencies and Departments, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010](#)

[Appendix 4. Federal Spending on Natural Resources and the Environment, Selected Fiscal Years, 1980–2017](#)

[Index](#)

Preface

As we near the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, environmental policy faces significant challenges both at home and around the world. New demands for dealing with the risks of climate change and threats to biological diversity, and for meeting the rising aspirations of the planet's seven and a half billion people, will force governments everywhere to rethink policy strategies. They need to find effective ways to reconcile environmental and economic goals and values through new approaches to sustainable development. In the United States, the early part of the decade saw a stagnant economy and persistently high unemployment, which encouraged policymakers and the business community to blame environmental policies and regulations for hindering economic growth and job creation, even where the evidence of such an impact was weak or nonexistent. The economy improved greatly by 2017, although, as economic inequality widened, the benefits of economic expansion failed to reach many who remained no better off than they were two decades earlier. Partly as a result, the dialogue over environmental policy has become even more politically contentious, and critics often blamed those policies for weakening economic growth and job creation.

Many of these criticisms continue to divide members of the two major parties deeply, as Republicans, particularly in the House of Representatives, have called for repealing, reducing, and reining in environmental policies and regulations in the face of strong Democratic defense of the same policies and actions. The result has been intense and relentless partisan debate on Capitol Hill and at the state and local levels where many of the same conflicts have been evident. Environmentalists have blamed Democrats as well for what they see as their often timid defense of environmental policy or for the ways in which they seek to balance what they see as competing economic and environmental goals even as new research demonstrates convincingly that this dichotomy represents a false choice. Political debate over the next few years may continue to be framed in these terms even as leading businesses, the scientific community, and increasing numbers of public officials recognize that the real challenge today is to find ways to meet economic and other human needs while also protecting the environment on which we depend.

The election of President Donald Trump in November 2016 brought a dramatic change in policy positions and priorities after eight years of the Barack Obama administration. Particularly in his second four-year term, Obama sought to strengthen protection of public health and the environment, foster the development of clean energy resources, and establish a viable and broadly supported path toward global action on climate change through the Paris Agreement of 2015. In contrast, early decisions in the Trump administration aimed to reverse many of Obama's major policy initiatives, especially on energy use and climate change. The differences between the two presidencies on societal values and policy priorities, key appointments to administrative agencies, budgetary support for established programs, and the use of science in decision making could hardly have been greater. What is less clear is whether the positions of the Trump presidency will win favor in Congress beyond initial actions to roll back environmental regulations, and whether the American public and the business community will support such a major reversal in public policy.

When the first environmental decade was launched in the early 1970s, protecting our air, water, and other

natural resources seemed a relatively simple proposition. The polluters and exploiters of nature would be brought to heel by tough laws requiring them to clean up or get out of business within five or ten years. But preserving the life support systems of the planet now appears a far more daunting task than anyone imagined back then. Not only are problems such as global climate change more complex than recognized by early efforts to control air and water pollution, but now more than ever, the success of U.S. policies is tied to the actions of other nations. This book seeks to explain the most important developments in environmental policy and politics since the 1960s and to analyze the central issues that face us today. Like the previous editions, it focuses on the underlying trends, institutional strengths and shortcomings, and policy dilemmas that all policy actors face in attempting to resolve environmental controversies. Chapters have been thoroughly revised and updated, and one of them is new to this edition. We have also attempted to compare the positions and actions of the Trump administration to those of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations and to put these differing approaches to environmental policy in the context of ongoing debates over the cost and effectiveness of past policies, as well as the search for ways to reconcile and integrate economic, environmental, and social goals through sustainable development. As such, the book has broad relevance for the environmental community and for all concerned with the difficulties and complexities of finding solutions to environmental problems at the end of this second decade of the twenty-first century.

Part I provides a retrospective view of policy development as well as a framework for analyzing policy change in the United States. [Chapter 1](#) serves as an introduction to the book by outlining the basic issues in U.S. environmental policy since the late 1960s, the development of institutional capabilities for addressing them, and the successes and failures in implementing policies and achieving results. In [Chapter 2](#), Barry G. Rabe considers the evolving role of the states in environmental policy at a time when the recent devolution of responsibilities may face scrutiny from new federal leaders. He focuses on innovative policy approaches used by the states and the promise of—as well as the constraints on—state action on the environment. Part I ends with a chapter by Luis E. Hestres and Matthew C. Nisbet that analyzes changes in environmental advocacy strategies in recent years and addresses a fundamental question about the capacity of environmentalists to make their case to the American public and policymakers at a time when conventional movement strategies have not been very successful and when opposition from industry and political conservatives is on the rise.

Part II analyzes the role of federal institutions in environmental policymaking. [Chapter 4](#), by Norman J. Vig, discusses the role of recent presidents as environmental actors, evaluating their leadership on the basis of several common criteria. In [Chapter 5](#), Michael E. Kraft examines the role of Congress in environmental policy, giving special attention to partisan conflicts over the environment and policy gridlock. The chapter focuses on recent debates and actions on national energy policy and climate change, over which Congress has struggled for much of the past decade. [Chapter 6](#) presents Rosemary O’Leary’s use of several in-depth case studies of judicial action to explore how the courts shape environmental policy. In [Chapter 7](#), Richard N. L. Andrews examines the EPA and the way it uses the policy tools granted to it by Congress, especially its regulatory authority, to address environmental challenges. Because regulations inherently place restrictions and burdens on businesses and state and local governments, Andrews uses several case studies to illuminate how the agency implements environmental policy while addressing the concerns of these constituencies and others, such as the president, members of Congress, the news media, and the courts, about varied

environmental risks and the costs and benefits of acting on them.

Some of the broader dilemmas in environmental policy formulation and implementation are examined in Part III. [Chapter 8](#), by Edward P. Weber, David Bernell, Hilary S. Boudet, and Patricia Fernandez-Guajardo, examines disputes over national energy policy, particularly controversies surrounding hydraulic fracturing or fracking, coal mining and carbon emissions, and the interdependence of water and energy resources. In [Chapter 9](#), Christopher Bosso and Nicole E. Tichenor examine the fascinating relationships between food and the environment, specifically the environmental impacts of the dominant food system on which the United States and other developed nations rely, the federal environmental laws that affect the production and sale of food, and the growing criticism about and ideas for change in the food system that are intended to reduce its ecological footprint while also ensuring that the nation and planet can continue to feed a growing number of people.

In [Chapter 10](#), Sheila M. Olmstead introduces economic perspectives on environmental policy, including the use of benefit-cost analysis, and she assesses the potential of market forces as an alternative or supplement to conventional regulation. She sees great potential in the use of market-based environmental and resource policies. [Chapter 11](#) moves the spotlight to evolving business practices. Daniel Press and Daniel A. Mazmanian examine the “greening of industry” or sustainable production, particularly the increasing use of market-based initiatives such as voluntary pollution prevention, information disclosure, and environmental management systems. They find that a creative combination of voluntary action and government regulation offers the best promise of success. Finally, in [Chapter 12](#), Kent E. Portney examines the intriguing efforts by communities throughout the nation to integrate environmental sustainability into policy decisions in areas as diverse as energy use, housing, transportation, land use, and urban social life—considerations made even more important today in an era of higher energy costs.

Part IV shifts attention to selected global issues and controversies. In [Chapter 13](#), Henrik Selin and Stacy D. VanDeveer survey the key scientific evidence and major disputes over climate change, as well as the evolution of the issue since the late 1980s. They also assess government responses to the problem of climate change and the outlook for public policy actions. [Chapter 14](#) examines the plight of developing nations that are struggling with a formidable array of threats brought about by rapid population growth and resource exploitation. Richard J. Tobin surveys the pertinent evidence, recounts cases of policy success and failure, and outlines the remaining barriers (including insufficient commitment by rich countries) to achieving sustainable development in these nations. In the final [Chapter 15](#) we review the many environmental challenges that continue to face the nation and the world and discuss innovative policy instruments that might help us to better address these issues in the future.

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