

U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy: A Public Issues Handbook. Gary C. Bryner. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998. xvii, 292 pp.

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With the twenty-fifth anniversary of Earth Day now several years in the past, the relatively unproblematic environmental agenda of the 1970s also seems a distant memory. Today environmental objectives are more complex, debate over appropriate policy mechanisms more divided, and political support for difficult policy choices less certain. As the authors of a recent review of U.S. environmental policy noted:

Deep cuts in federal agency budgets in 1996 and the heightened anti-environmental rhetoric and political backlash - in the states as well as in Congress - plainly indicate that environmental policy is at an important crossroads. Future achievements are critically dependent on understanding the new anti-environmental movements within and outside of government, improving our knowledge of the diversity of environmental risks we face, and devising effective policy actions that are broadly acceptable to the American public. (Kraft and Vig 1997:2)

Nowhere are these issues confronted as starkly as in the debate over the management of public lands in the United States. These dilemmas frame Gary Bryner's U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy. Subtitled "A Public Issues Handbook," this volume is best seen as a reference work, although the detailed treatment of policy struggles between lobbyists, Congress, and the White House during the Clinton administration makes it something of a primer on current national environmental politics. This "handbook" is intended:

to bring together the relevant data and to outline the major issues that are at the heart of the debate over public lands. The book seeks to contribute to the debate and to improve policy making in general by providing a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the issues-- the environmental conditions, problems, and trends; the major laws and regulations; the policy-making structure; and the broader political context in which this debate takes place. (p. xiv)

The first three chapters treat broad themes in federal land and resource policy. Chapter 1 summarizes demographic changes in the American West, the increasingly strident contest between environmental and property rights advocacy (such as the "Wise Use" movement), and the status of takings claims in environmental and land-use policy. Chapter 2 provides a very brief history of federal land and resources policy. Chapter 3 describes the major federal agencies and the key legislation that govern public lands and resources. The next six chapters treat specific policy areas: biodiversity (Chapter 4), forestry (Chapter 5), grazing (Chapter 6), mining and energy (Chapter 7), water resources (Chapter 8), and national parks and wilderness (chapter 9). A brief concluding chapter summarizes the preceding themes, and calls for new ways of thinking about the place of humans in the environment.

Bryner thus sets very demanding goals for a single-volume, single-author work. U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy is most successful in summarizing a broad range of relevant legislation. To a considerable extent it also succeeds in describing the political currents that have shaped the debate on specific issues, such as mining, grazing, or forest management. The historical perspective of Bryner's work is, however, rather truncated. Chapter 2 ("The Evolution of Public Lands Policy") devotes just five pages to public lands policy from the late eighteenth century to the 1970s, followed by twenty-five pages describing political skirmishing over the management of public lands during the Clinton administration. The scientific basis of environmental problems and policy solutions gets little attention, perhaps most noticeably in the rather vague treatment of the

Reviews

concepts of “biodiversity” and “ecosystem” in Chapter 4.

Most chapters devoted to specific policy topics conclude with recommendations, though in several cases these are described only briefly. Thus the chapter on forest and timber policy suggests, among other options: altering forestry practices to extend the life of timber stands before cutting; using selective cuts; modifying accounting methods to recognize the full cost of timber production; providing assistance to displaced timber workers; allowing the purchase of conservation easements to protect ecologically fragile areas; taxing the export of raw logs to encourage domestic production of value-added wood products; and increasing the recycling of paper products. Here and elsewhere Bryner’s policy suggestions are useful, though usually not novel. Unfortunately the reader is given little guidance to the extensive literature on these policy alternatives. Similarly, while Bryner faithfully provides citations to the numerous federal statutes mentioned in the text, he seldom provides references to books or articles analyzing these often highly controversial pieces of legislation.

On the other hand, the wealth of detail is a major strength of the book. In addition to the thorough treatment of federal legislation, forty-two tables provide much useful information: among these, Forest Service appropriations by administrative function (Table 5.3); acreage of federally-owned land by state (Table 2.3); and the number of productive coal leases on federal lands (Table 7.2). An index provides an effective guide to the legislation discussed, though one might wish for more detail regarding issues and environmental concepts.

On the whole Bryner writes clearly, and can be very effective in briefly summarizing large amounts of information. One can, however, be too concise, and Professor Bryner often is, packing information on policy issues and options into dense paragraphs of text that would be far more intelligible if set off in boxes or bulleted lists. For example, he summarizes relevant provisions of the 1994 Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act (part of the 104th Congress’s “Contract with America”) in a single 15-line sentence (p. 42). There is little in the typographic design to help the reader navigate through the barrage of laws, agencies, and policy provisions spanning 292 pages of small print.

This work also shows signs of overly hasty editing. Thus the National Park Service’s backlog of maintenance projects is estimated variously as \$6 billion and \$4 billion (on pp. 264 and 265 respectively). Agriculture in California is said to consume 90 percent (on p. 222) and 82 percent (on p. 225) of the state’s water. In discussing biodiversity and the Endangered Species Act, Bryner notes, “One reason the concept of species is so unclear is that very few have actually been studied in nature” (p. 109) -a statement which still has me puzzled after several readings.

Gary Bryner is a political scientist and director of the Public Policy Program at Brigham Young University, a geographic base that may have contributed to the marked emphasis on issues significant for the interior west, such as mining and grazing. Yet this regional emphasis also follows from the distribution of public lands. A central theme in the history of natural resource policy in the United States is the control of vast tracts of land in the west, used primarily for the production of raw materials, from metropolitan centers of finance and government in the east. This is a domestic version of the dependency economy.

In all, nearly thirty percent of the land in the United States is controlled by the federal government. Yet in the West the proportion is often far higher: 83 percent of Nevada, 66 percent of Alaska, 60 percent of Oregon. In terms of both theory and policy the management of federal lands offers interesting points of comparison with the control and exploitation of comparable private lands, for example privately held forest or grazing lands. In large measure the control of public lands is shaped by a three-sided contest between the corporations that utilize particular resources (timber, minerals, grazing rights, recreation), resource-dependent communities, and citizen-stakeholders spread across the country, who typically experience little of either the costs or benefits of the federal policies enacted in their name.

The political confrontations symbolized at the margins by Earth First!ers and Wise Use advocates are played out in less dramatic forms in regions and communities across the United

Reviews

States, and particularly in the western states. Nor in this reckoning should the impact of federal land management decisions on adjacent communities be minimized. The county supremacy "movement," which claims for county governments jurisdiction over federal lands within their borders, may be reactionary and constitutionally absurd. Nonetheless, it is probably significant that 93 percent of Nye County, Nevada - a poster child for the county supremacy advocates - is owned by the federal government. Among the federal facilities in Nye County is Yucca Mountain, the proposed and highly controversial site for the nation's high-level nuclear waste repository (Bryner, p. 9).

Many of the environmental issues confronted in the 1970s did yield, at least in part, to command-driven regulatory approaches. For the type of gross industrial pollution of waterways that prompted the Clean Water Act of 1972, end-of-pipe regulations were often quite effective. Yet many of the management dilemmas cataloged in this book will not yield easily if at all to top-down policy solutions. "Although problems are ill-structured, government is highly structured," as Wayne Parsons remarks in *Public Policy* (Parsons 1995:89). Where public lands are concerned, everyone has standing. Federal agencies are often caught in conflicting roles, needing both to implement environmental protections and to facilitate commercial extraction of resources. Policy conflicts over public lands reflect not only the collision of interests, but often equally the collision at a local level of world-views and social systems. Future policy approaches to the management of public lands and resources will need to synthesize more effectively strategies shaped by national-level policy goals with tactics reflecting local-level social mechanisms for compromise and cooperation.

In U.S. Land and Natural Resources Policy Gary Bryner has done a notable job in synthesizing a large amount of useful information on the policy problems and prospects involved in managing federal lands and resources in the United States.

References Cited:

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