



Winter 2003

Federalism in the Forest: National versus State Natural Resource Policy, by Tomas M. Koontz

Heather Wight-Axling

Recommended Citation

Heather Wight-Axling, *Federalism in the Forest: National versus State Natural Resource Policy*, by Tomas M. Koontz, 43 Nat. Resources J. 335 (2003).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol43/iss1/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Natural Resources Journal by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

and Turney's fascinating confrontation with the feds over Endangered Species Act minimum flows and dismisses the state's complex and flawed water rights acquisition program with distain but little detail. The book's value must rest on the story of the compact and the litigation, where it is precious indeed.

Chris Nunn Garcia, Ph.D.
Former editor of the N.M. State Engineer's *WaterLine*
Former faculty member in
the University of New Mexico's Dept. of Economics
and The University of Arizona's Hydrology Dept.

Federalism in the Forest: National versus State Natural Resource Policy.
By Tomas M. Koontz. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002. Pp. 248. \$24.95 paper.

The differences in state and national forestry policy have never been as ripe for examination as they are today. Recently, President Bush indicated that he might reduce restrictions on logging in national forests to prevent further fire damage in the West, bringing federal forest policy into closer line with a state forest policy that has always emphasized timber production. The President's statement coincided nicely with the release of Tomas Koontz's latest publication, *Federalism in the Forest: National versus State Natural Resource Policy*. Koontz delivers a concise and readable summary of the differences between federal and state forestry policies. The volume will prove to be a particularly valuable read if indeed the distinctions between the two regimes blur in the future.

Koontz, a professor at Ohio State University, shows stark differences in agency policy between state and federal levels. These policies diverged in the 1970s, due largely to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the National Forestry Management Act of 1976. Koontz's most important conclusion is that today state agencies manage public forests with an emphasis on timber outputs, economic profitability, and revenue sharing with local governments, while federal agencies manage national forests with broader concerns for environmental protection and conservation. In this volume, Koontz tries to show why.

Koontz restricted his study in an effort to make it more manageable. He collected data from only a single year, 1995. Geographically, he limited his research to state and national forests in only four states: Ohio, Indiana, Oregon, and Washington. To better

understand how certain factors affected agency policy, he employed three methods of data collection: (1) extensive interviews with agency officials and citizens, (2) attendance at public meetings, and (3) analysis of agency documents (*e.g.* agency reports, budget proposals, and internal memos). He supplemented information gleaned from these sources by distributing questionnaires to agency personnel.

Koontz's book analyzes this data. The first five chapters discuss differences in state and federal "performance" (a term that refers to economic output, conservation measures, and interaction with citizens). Koontz then applies bureaucratic behavior theory in an attempt to explain the differences between state and federal agency practices. The book concludes with a section evaluating the theoretical and practical implications of the differences for forestry policy.

Koontz finds stark differences in federal and state agency revenue generation. Proportionally, state agencies make more profits from timber sales than do federal agencies. In turn, state timber sale profits are paid into a general fund and are reinvested in state timber programs. In contrast, the proceeds generated by federal timber sales are sent to general Forest Service funds rather than returning to the system of their origin.

Federal and state agencies also differ in their preservation efforts. Koontz compares ecosystem management, rare species identification and protection, soil and watershed protection, and other research efforts with an emphasis on conservation. He finds that federal agencies implement much more extensive environmental protection programs and procedures in all four of the states studied.

Koontz's study revealed further disparities in citizen participation between federal and state forestry management. While advocates of devolution (the process by which federally regulated programs are transferred to state control) maintain that decentralization of control facilitates citizen participation, Koontz discovered the opposite. He found that federal officials encourage participation more than do state officials.

Koontz analyzes his survey data to discern factors that could explain the differences between federal and state practices. He evaluates rules and laws that constrain agency behavior, budgetary incentives, citizen pressure, agency officials' beliefs, and agency "community" (the degree of homogeneity of beliefs within an agency). Surprisingly, Koontz discovers that budgetary incentives rarely affect state or federal agency decisions, because officials see no correlation between their activities and changes in funding. Similarly, agency officials' beliefs and agency community fail to explain the differences in state and federal forestry policy. Instead, Koontz concludes that different rules and citizen

pressure best explain the differences in state and federal management policies.

The different rules governing agency behavior illustrate the contrast between federal and state management. Federal statutes such as the National Forest Management Act, the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act constrain logging activities in national forests. These federal laws provide for more citizen participation, including the opportunity for citizens to block proposed logging projects. In contrast, state laws rarely impose stringent limits on logging, and they allow fewer opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns. In short, state laws primarily reflect stronger economic concerns, while federal laws embody both economic and conservation objectives.

Citizen pressure is another factor that accounts for differences in federal and state agency practices. Koontz concludes that citizens with commodity interests are more active at the state level, while those with preservation interests are more active at the federal level. Koontz acknowledges that this element is intertwined with the rules that govern agency decisions, as the rules themselves incorporate channels for citizen involvement.

These somewhat obvious conclusions beg the question: does this entire book boil down to a simple "chicken or egg" dilemma? Why did Koontz center his study on agency officials, rather than examining the rules that constrain them at the outset? And in terms of citizen participation, do the citizens and their particular interests actually affect agency policy? Or are national and state agencies simply more adept at responding to citizens whose objectives parallel their own? Koontz's reliance on bureaucratic behavior theory does not answer the more fundamental question of whether officials merely follow the rules or play an active role in shaping their development.

In addition to its commonsense conclusion that rules are the primary source of differences in federal and state forestry management, *Federalism in the Forest* has a few structural shortcomings. The graphs and tables frequently make the text redundant. The same text is often repeated in different subsections. Moreover, Koontz fails to define some key phrases and terms. In a discussion of citizen participation in the state and federal policy processes, for example, he repeatedly uses the word "communicate" without defining it. Readers are left wondering if this communication involved brief phone calls, in-depth meetings, or something else entirely. If readers do not know how substantive the communication was, they won't be persuaded that it could determine an agency's policies.

Federalism in the Forest is neither exhaustive in its scope nor comprehensive in its analysis, but to its credit, it does not purport to be either. Koontz candidly acknowledges the temporal limit to his research and the need for further investigation. As a result, the text is more descriptive than conclusive. It is a useful tool with which to begin a study of natural resource management, but it is by no stretch of the imagination an all-encompassing authority on the topic.

Notwithstanding the book's textual deficiencies, Koontz's conclusions are important, especially in a political climate in which the President proposes to replace federal forestry management objectives with more state-like objectives of profitability. The text is accessible to a wide range of readers, though it is probably best suited for those with little background in natural resource management who want to learn the basics of forestry policy. Its approach will seem elementary and its evaluation cursory for those readers in search of more profound analyses.

However, concerned citizens following the President's plans for logging in national forests will find this volume particularly telling. Will Bush's reduction of restrictions on logging in national forests irreparably disrupt the delicate state-federal counteractions? If both state and federal governments emphasize profitability, who will protect the environment? Changing policies at the federal level will have a decidedly significant impact on environmental protection. Clearly, Koontz's concern with intergovernmental policies is a pertinent topic of discussion and one that deserves further and more probative investigation and analysis.

Heather Wight-Axling
J.D. Candidate, University of New Mexico
M.A., Western Washington University