



Fall 1974

Politics, Policy and Natural Resources, edited by Dennis L. Thompson

Helen Ingram

Recommended Citation

Helen Ingram, *Politics, Policy and Natural Resources, edited by Dennis L. Thompson*, 14 Nat. Resources J. 580 (1974).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol14/iss4/8>

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.

Politics, Policy and Natural Resources

Edited by

DENNIS L. THOMPSON

New York: The Free Press

1972, 451 pp., \$12.95

The expanding market of college courses dealing with environmental policy has produced a shelf full of new "readers" dealing with the politics of this or that resource or form of pollution. As Charles O. Jones concludes, these books range "From Gold to Garbage," with the preponderance the latter.¹ It is consequently refreshing that Dennis Thompson's *Politics, Policy and Natural Resources* contains among its 28 readings so much worth collecting. Unfortunately, the Free Press has chosen to issue the book only in a large, hard back edition, which many students cannot afford.

The impression given to students by most environmental "readers" is that the subject was invented on Earth Day in 1970, and that only well-known environmentalists like Paul Ehrlich, David Brower, and Barry Commoner have written about it. Thompson has selected from the works of many outstanding and longstanding scholars of institutions and natural resources, among them Lynton Caldwell, Arthur Maas, Norman Wengert, Ashley Schiff, and Vincent Ostrom. It is a matter of some interest here that six of the selections were first printed in the *Natural Resources Journal*. Mr. Z's "Case for a Department of Natural Resources," published in the *Journal* in 1961, is as relevant and useful to the issue of a Department of Energy and Natural Resources today as it was when the Kennedy Administration was pondering the perennial topic of reorganization.

Most people, even scientists and technicians addressed by Professor Thompson in his prefatory remarks, already recognize the importance of the political process. However, the notion of politics is frequently circumscribed to determining how to do what government ought to do for the environment. Other questions, including how an issue become salient and is placed on the governmental agenda, how people perceive issues, and how information is generated and transmitted, are more fruitful but less obvious. Who the participants are and the influences which shape their behavior are also important to an understanding of natural resources decisions. The Thompson book affords a fairly comprehensive policy treatment. A chapter, including four pieces of political science "policy" literature, is provided for

1. Jones, *From Gold to Garbage: A Bibliographic Essay on Politics and the Environment*, 66 *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 588 (1972).

perspective. Another chapter is dedicated to the important consideration of public perception and the formation and role of public attitudes in resource decisionmaking. Excellent articles by Gilbert White and Thomas Saarinen are included. The subject of administrative agencies, important actors in resource decision-making, is well covered. Stanley Cain, for example, contributes a first hand view of the diversity which characterizes the Department of Interior.

There are gaps in the book which are bound to limit a student's understanding of resource policy unless he is provided with supplementary reading. Although little is said about the role of mass public opinion and media coverage in policy making, these obviously have been crucial to the passage of innovative legislation in the recent environmental era. Absent from the book is a consideration of the environmental movement as a collection of interest groups. There are selections about conservation as an idea but not as a political force where leadership, cohesion, numbers, and money are relevant.

The editor should have included an article on legislative treatment of the environment. Congress has been the central area for most national legislation in the natural resources and the environmental field, including the 1970 Clean Air Act, the 1972 Water Quality Amendments, and the more recent land use legislation. A book on the politics of natural resources should explain the changing role of congressmen on resource committees such as Interior and Insular Affairs and Public Works.

Missing from the volume is a selection authored by someone like Joseph Sax. Courts on the federal and state levels have become important policy makers in the environment. Environmentally oriented lawyers and law professors such as Sax are partly responsible. Wishing to use their professional skills to further the cause, they have drafted legislation and initiated litigation to force administrative agencies to take into account the consequences of actions to natural surroundings. Judges, too, have contributed to the current significance of courts in this policy area. Their favorable reception to environmental suits has encouraged environmentalists to view them as an access point. It would have improved the Thompson collection to have a few readings on the role of the courts.

It is disappointing that Professor Thompson does not do more in the way of introduction and headnotes to parts of the book. He seems not to have had a framework in mind for conceptualizing the policymaking process for natural resources. Topics or titles to parts do not relate to one another obviously or coherently, and the editor nowhere explains how they do. Each part is a collection of articles

on a topic, but there is no overall analysis of articles with comparisons and contrasts. Luckily the readings themselves are wide ranging and generally provocative, allowing the reader or instructor to impose his own design.

A great many texts intended to respond quickly to the changing market are likely to be out of date soon. Books on the environmental crises have given way to volumes on the energy crisis which, in turn, may shortly be replaced by "readers" on the food crisis. Despite its limitations, the Thompson collection contains solid scholarship on enduring questions. As a text or reference book it is likely to retain its relevance.

HELEN INGRAM*

*Professor, Institute of Government Research, University of Arizona.