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Political Ecology

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Political Ecology



I. Introduction

Many hold environmental legislation in high esteem. Policy makers and the public in general often view federal environmental protection as a moral necessity for future well-being. A closer examination however, reveals that many of these policies create negative outcomes.

Rather than having a basis in sound science, environmental policies are often rooted in flawed reasoning that is rejected by modern ecologists.

Additionally, political incentives have been shown to play a large part in the development of these regulations. As a result, ineffective policies are often implemented that waste taxpayer dollars and harm the environment they are designed to protect.

Political Ecology is an upcoming book that explores many shortcomings inherent in current federal land management. To explain these failures, we examine the “ecology of politics” and the “politics of ecology.”



<http://images.cdn.fotopedia.com/flickr-164341428-hd.jpg>

II. Methods

We first began by defining the “ecology of politics” and the “politics of ecology”. Ecology is the study of the interactions between organisms, making “ecology of politics” the study of the interactions between political actors. The “politics of ecology” on the other hand, refers to the “beliefs about ecology held by the public, press, and policy makers” (Simmons, 2014).

This definitional step was then followed by selecting prominent pieces of environmental legislation, studying their histories, and analyzing relevant case studies involving each congressional act.

In the project’s final phase, data was compiled in narrative form for publishing.

Legislation and Agencies Examined

Clean Air Act	National Environmental Protection Agency
Clean Water Act	Wilderness Act
Endangered Species Act	Federal Land Policy
Energy Policy Act	



Lofthouse 2013

III. Results

Our case studies indicate that environmental policy is heavily influenced by the self-interest of political actors. In each of the case studies, the individual benefits sought by interest groups, politicians, and bureaucrats were all gained through legislation that imposed costs on taxpayers and created adverse environmental effects.

For example, specific provisions within the Clean Water Act in have actually contributed to increased water pollution, and lessened common law environmental protections overall. Similarly, preferential treatment of certain sectors of the coal industry has increased regional air and water pollution.

IV. Conclusions

Public perception and political reality differ greatly. While many people support environmental policy in the belief of goodwill, the politics of ecology is still bound by an essentially decentralized economy of knowledge. Politicians tend to grasp onto ideas like “wilderness” and the “balance of nature” to guide their efforts, while these ideas are no longer supported by modern ecology.

Science moves faster than politics. Additionally, people do not remove the biases and heuristics that govern human decision making processes when they enter office. Instead, they continue to make decisions based on their incentives. Often, this led to the paradoxical outcome of environmental policy that actually harms the environment.

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