PLS 209 – Environmental Politics
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Topic: Introduction

Development of the Environmental Movement
- Early writers emphasized the importance of conserving nature
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature" (1836)
  - Henry David Thoreau (Lived on Walden Pond – 1845 to 1847)
  - George Perkins Marsh's Man and Nature (1864)
- Conservation
  - Managing and protecting natural resources while enjoying and using them in ways that prevent their exploitation, depletion, and pollution so as to ensure their future use
  - It means different things to different people
- John Muir (1838 – 1914)
  - Conservation = preservation
  - John Muir felt that absolute preservation of wild and scenic environments was the only way to save them for future generations.
- Theodore Roosevelt (1901 to 1909)
  - Created U.S. Forest Service and U.S. National Forest System
  - Significantly expanded national forests
  - Created first federally protected wildlife refuge (Pelican Island, Indian River, FL)
  - Designated 18 national monuments through the American Antiquities Act
- Gifford Pinchot – head of the U.S.F.S. under Roosevelt
  - He views conservation as utilitarian resource management "the use of the earth for the good of man"
- Aldo Leopold – worked for USFS in the 1920s
  - In *Sand County Almanac* he argues that it is important to love and respect the land and argues that conservation is getting us no where
  - Aldo Leopold wrote: "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect"
- 1930s – Depression and Dust Bowl
  - Franklin Roosevelt creates the Civilian Conservation Corps – constructed recreational facilities, fire fighting, fish hatcheries, other volunteer efforts similar to contemporary programs such as AmeriCorps
  - TVA builds dams to "electrify" the region
  - Other federal public works projects construct dams, reservoirs, etc.
  - Soil Conservation Service (SCS) (Now the Natural Resource Conservation Service) established to improve farming practices and build communities

Shift to Environmental Protection
- Rachel Carson – USFWS Biologist
  - Publishes the influential book Silent Spring in 1962 in which she describes how chemicals such as DDT bioaccumulate in fish and birds and other higher levels of the food chain

- – Draws attention to the plight of the Bald Eagle, Peregrine falcons, and other species
    - – Bioaccumulation of toxics and metals is still the reason for many fish advisories
- 1969 – 1972 – whole host of new federal environmental laws
    - – National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) (1969)
    - – Clean Air Act (1970)
    - – Clean Water Act (1972)
    - – Coastal Zone Management Act (1972)
- April 22, 1970 – first Earth Day

Pollution Control
- Detrimental change in the physical, chemical, biological characteristics of air, water, soil or other environmental resources
    - – Point sources: identifiable sites such as a sewage treatment plant, smoke stack, or industrial discharge
    - – Nonpoint sources (NPS): diffuse sources of pollution generated by such things as erosion, stormwater runoff, marinas, hydromodifcations, habitat alteration
    - – Distinction is in how these sources are defined in federal pollution control laws
- Dominant approach to addressing pollution was through command and control regulations
- Recent attention on complex problems such as NPS and habitat protection illustrates the limitations with this approach
    - – More attention on marketable permits, collaborative planning, public education, etc.
    - – More attention on ecosystem-based approaches such as watershed management
- Growing capacity for environmental protection and resource management at the state and local level

Terms and Concepts
- *Ecology* is the study of interrelationship among living things such as:
    - – *Populations*: Individuals of a single species living in a defined area
    - – *Communities*: Interacting populations of different species in a defined area
    - – *Ecosystems*: A community of living organisms interacting in a defined physical environment where living and nonliving components are linked by chemical exchanges, biological interactions and energy flow
        - – *Ecosystems* are defined in terms of natural landscapes, human designated boundaries, or even legislation
        - – Includes forests, watersheds, oceans, riverbasins, mountains, grasslands, wetlands, etc.
        - – May be as small as a rock or as large as an ocean
- *Biodiversity* is the number of different plan and animal species living in a defined ecosystem or study area
    - – Taxonomists estimate that there are about 1.75 million species of plants and animals
    - – Before humans, about 1 species per million became extinct each year, which was matched by an equal number of new species
    - – 1990s the estimate was that close to 1000 species per million became extinct

- − Last mass extinction was the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago
- − About 95% of all of the species that have ever lived are now extinct
- ▪ Sustainability and Stewardship
    - − *Sustainable* practices focus on meeting present day needs without sacrificing future needs. Less about preservation than it is wholeness
    - − *Stewardship* is an ethical view that humans have a responsibility to care for and wisely use the earth's resources
    - − Sustainability can be thought of in different ways
        - − *Environmental sustainability* requires that industrial and agricultural development conform to the expandable but limited carrying capacity of biotic communities
        - − *Social sustainability* requires that just and informed citizens participate in the governance and improvement of human communities
        - − *Cultural sustainability* requires that people partake of the educational and social opportunities inherent in a multicultural, multilingual world, while respecting and tolerating (up to a point) political and ethical differences
        - − *Economic sustainability* requires that environmental costs be included in consumer prices and that wealth be shared more equitably
- ▪ *Biosphere* is the sum total of all of the ecosystems and is the relatively small layer where living organisms can be found (top of Mount Everest to bottom of Mariana trench in the pacific)
    - − Biotic factors are living organisms and abiotic factors (materials and forces) such as temperature, elevation, humidity, precipitation, etc.
- ▪ We are more concerned with *governance* than government
    - − *Governance*: refers to the patchwork of people, institutions (rules), governmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (private firms and nonprofit organizations) involved at all levels of public and private policy making (i.e., decision making processes) whose decisions collectively govern the utilization of natural resources or impacts on the environment
    - − Avoid tendency to think that centralized governmental arrangements are more effective than decentralized or polycentric arrangements
    - − Hass, Keohane, and Levy (1993) argue that successful environmental governance requires three fundamental tasks
        - − Increasing environmental awareness and concern
        - − Increasing the political capacity to act in a timely and multilateral fashion – political capacity is the availability of financial, bureaucratic, technical, and educational tools of policy making
        - − Enhancing the contractual environment – contractual environment refers to the bargaining forums, diplomatic procedures, monitoring, accounting, and verification procedures

Five Challenges for People Who Make, Manage, or Study Environmental Policy (Fiorino 1995)

- Setting the Policy Agenda
  - More problems demanding attention than there is money, people, knowledge, or political will to solve
  - Tend to respond incrementally, in a piecemeal fashion to environmental problems
  - Tend to be reactive not proactive
  - How do you prioritize problems?
  - How do you keep from getting distracted by the issue of the moment and maintain a sustained long-term effort focused on a specific problem
- Maintaining Democratic Values
  - "Can a technocratic society remain a democratic one?"
  - Much of the public and many government practitioners lack sophisticated technical knowledge
    - How do you effectively involve the public?
    - How do you avoid giving too much power to the technocrats?
  - How do you define problems?
    - Are environmental problems objective or subjective?
  - How do you reconcile technical and democratic values in a decision making process
  - Conventional policy process is often ineffective when it tries to balance the needs for growth and development with those of health and environmental protection for current and future generations
- Using Social Resources Efficiently
  - No such thing as a free lunch
    - Resources allocated to one problem can not be allocated to others
    - Problem within environmental area and across other social policy areas
    - Opportunity costs – could resources be allocated more effectively elsewhere
    - Competition for funding with other federal, state, and local policy priorities
  - Should use resources efficiently
    - Often not the case in many environmental areas
    - Should environmental risks be as close to zero as possible regardless of the cost?
    - C/B analysis – should it guide decisions?
  - Should know what you get in return for expenditures (see measuring progress below)
    - Unfortunately, monitoring is weak in many areas – EX: After 3 decades, we still don't have a good picture of national water quality
    - Often poor data on implementation efforts and few attempts to develop integrated data bases that combine environmental data, social data, economic data, using new information technology
- Building, developing, adapting, and maintaining institutions
  - Success at dealing with environmental problems depends on the strength and adaptability of institutions and the relationships between them
  - Need to better integrate environmental programs (e.g., air, water, hazardous waste, etc.) and policy sectors (e.g., environment, agriculture, transportation, etc.)
    - Problem definition, analysis, and decision making are often fragmented

- – Capacity for addressing international problems needs to be enhanced (e.g., Great Lakes, Tijuana River, Mediterranean Sea, fisheries, global change, etc.)
- – Need to improve the way public and private institutions relate to one another
  - – Us vs. Them, development vs. environment mentality must change
  - – Too much conflict and distrust, many problems will require cooperation and collaboration
  - – Need greater shared understanding of the meaning of "property rights"
- – Build more capacity at state and local levels
  - – Present system is federally driven
  - – Current problems do not match the "one size fits all" nature of many federal environment programs
  - – Watershed/Ecosystem-based approaches require more local initiative
- – Need new institutional arrangements to deal with complicated watershed based problems
  - – Need to stop thinking in terms of "centralized is best" when it comes to institutional arrangements
- ▪ Measuring and Evaluating Progress
  - – Need more information on how we are doing, assessing the trends in the extent and severity of problems, and successes or failures in solving them
  - – Need indicators to define acceptable measures of progress
    - – Other policy sectors have well established measures (e.g., unemployment rates, interest rates, new home sales
  - – Indicators should inform relevant decisionmakers
    - – Macro measures may not help to make micro decisions
    - – Lot of federal monitoring and development of indicators is of little use to state and local decisionmakers
    - – Example: 1/24,000 GIS maps can help evaluate a local permit
  - – Offsets and tradeoffs between sources
    - – In past 20 years we see a decrease in POTWs and an increase in NPS
  - – Data are uneven
  - – Difficult to link measures we do have to program performance
    - – How do you know what program gets the credit or the blame
    - – Is it better to think in terms of a system of programs when evaluating performance
  - – Cause and effect linkages are often difficult to establish
    - – Ecosystems have their own variability and multiple equilibrium points

Rosenbaum's (1998) introductory chapter alludes to a related set of challenges
- ▪ Growing importance of environmental issues adds further complexity
  - – Must develop policies that satisfy both national and international constituencies
  - – Global issues increasingly crowd and already crowded national environmental agenda
- ▪ Science plays many roles
  - – Science can often raise issues on political agendas and helps define policy options
  - – Unfortunately, existing data on environmental quality is often scarce, monitoring is often undervalued and underfunded
  - – Experience with many problems is too recent to provide carefully tested evidence

- Activities such as monitoring, forecasting, statistical analysis, C/B analysis, and risk assessment are tedious, time-consuming, underfunded, politically dull, and are done in time frames that don't match the realities of the policy process
- Competition of policy analysts/scientific experts among government and NGOs makes it more difficult to rely on "science" to inform decisions
- Interestingly, while the media can often take scientific results and arouse public and political concerns, science and conflicting results can simultaneously delay and confound the search for a solution
- What weight should different information such as scientific, technical, cost/benefit, risk assessment, values, political feasibility have in the decision making process?
- Real or assumed failures of political institutions
  - Public, media, and politicians all too often blame bureaucrats and public institutions for the failure of environmental policies
  - Sometimes it is simply a failed policy, resources are inadequate, etc.
  - Often fail to consider what would have happened in the absence of the policy, no matter how bad it performed
- Complex and fragmented institutional environment
  - Nearly every important environmental problem has a major federal law with responsibilities shared among a wide range of federal agencies
  - Every law gets its own strategy so the same substance may be regulated differently whether it is found in the food, air, water, or food crops
  - Congressional committees are equally fragmented, which complicates drafting legislation
  - Congressional committees and staff often micromanage agencies by setting unrealistic deadlines, providing vague guidance with respect to how agencies should exercise their administrative discretion, and provide appropriations that are vastly less than original authorizations, which were themselves unrealistic
  - Government institutions themselves become vested interests in the policy process
- Technology can create environmental problems or offers solutions
  - Scientific and technical innovations, no matter how beneficial, almost always require tradeoffs between environmental risks and social and/or economic benefits
- There are often ecological surprises
  - Complex web of causality that can span great geographic distances, different media, can be explained by many causal processes, cause and effect may be difficult to document, and can span years or decades
  - Implies that there are important ecological problems left to "discover"
  - "Ecology is a science rich in surprise and uncertainty" – thus one should be careful to jump to conclusions and keep an open mind, something easier said than done for many in the environmental movement
- Implementation problems and ways that results can be less than satisfactory
  - Inadequate agency staffing and budgets
  - Lack of resources to monitor and enforce laws
  - When should Congress or the President attempt to influence how an agency implements a law?
  - How much discretion should technocrats have?

- Unreasonable expectations
  - Many activists and citizens may have unrealistic expectations about what can be accomplished by environmental programs
  - Takes a long time to cause problems, it can take an equally long time to clean them up
  - Lack of funding in relation to size of the problem (e.g., nonpoint source pollution)
  - Lack of appreciating the realities of federalism, property rights, the lack of capacity in many state and local institutions
  - Public focus is sometimes not on problems deemed most important by scientists or agencies
- Significant reforms are needed
  - Numerous studies suggest that major reforms in the way EPA is organized and administered is needed
  - Few changes have occurred and those who suggest changes are often labeled as "anti-environmental" even though the focus may be on how programs are administered, not the substance of policies
  - Many have suggested greater focus on voluntary approaches, incentive-based approaches, market-based approaches, education, etc. In other words, that other policy tools should be utilized other than command and control regulation
  - Many suggest that more control be devolved to states, local governments, or regional efforts such as watershed management programs. Real debate over whose policies should drive the process.

Hemple's (1996) book is a bit more conceptual and argumentative in nature
- Book is about the momentous political choices that will shape the environmental future of our planet
  - "The future is not some place we are going to but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination" (Schaar 1993)
- He gives heavy emphasis on the importance of both global and local ends of the spectrum – "glocal focus"
  - He argues that environmental problems are increasingly transboundary and global in scope or significance, yet, governance remains sharply fragmented and territorial
  - It is argued that a new and environmentally oriented world order will have to emerge that is "glocal" in character in that there will be a greater devolution of power away from the nation-state to both supranational and subnational (regional, local) levels of governance
  - Wants more empowerment of local communities because it permits face to face deliberation of a type and scale that can foster ecological and social learning in ways that may promote sustainable lifestyles
  - Central premise is that only by linking community ecological values with democratic design of policies and markets can sustainability be achieved
- Argument is not that incremental action is preferred or will be sufficient to avert ecological disaster. Instead, it is merely that such limited action may be all that the conditions of political feasibility will permit
  - Punctuations in the political equilibrium caused by focusing events or policy windows will at times allow sudden bursts of change

- However, insisting on radical departures in all cases is likely to only strengthen the resolve of entrenched interests
- Major objective of the book is to demonstrate why the resolve to act must be accompanied by a deeper understanding of the causes of environmental destruction and by a more coherent grasp of the ethical, political, and economic forces that influence the design of institutional and policy responses
  - Getting the causal theory right is the first step in good policy design
  - The book's emphasis on policy design helps draw attention to the role that institutions and procedures play in making environmental policy
  - Focus is on environmental policy making as a process and its connection to themes such as national sovereignty, democracy, civic community, federalism, social learning, and the role of science in the policy process
- Author lists design elements of environmental governance on page 25
  - Proposals illustrate how it is difficult to formulate environmental policy in a vacuum and not consider other policy issues
  - Proposals give some indication of the author's policy preferences, normative biases, and the values that he emphasizes
- Raises some interesting questions
  - Will increasing reliance on science undermine democracy thereby further eroding participation uninformed or scientifically illiterate citizens
    - Habermas (1971) describes a "decisionistic society" in which access to expertise is the principal source of power for political elites
    - Danger is that scientists and technocrats will increasingly define the agendas and alternatives that will reduce the bargaining and compromise that are the hall marks of a democratic process
    - Politicians would still chose one policy option over another, but the experts would increasingly shape the deliberative framework in which this process occurs
    - Public concern may divide along the lines of the few who are literate and the many are not
  - Will any truly deliberative form of democracy be capable of responding in time to avert disaster?
  - Other side of the coin is the problem of the tyranny of the majority – a weakness of a truly deliberative process
    - What happens if the majority understands the science but chooses instead to adopt the non-environmental solution?

Things to watch for when reading chapters
- Beware of author's normative bias
  - Rosenbaum's (1998) summary of the politics of different President's may be a bit biased.
  - While Reagan is clearly the President that was most hostile to the environment, his critique of George Bush may be a bit negative while his discussion of Clinton/Gore is overly positive
  - If Clinton/Gore were such "environmentalists" Nader and the Green Party would have supported Gore. Actually very few changes in major environmental legislation even though Clinton/Gore controlled both houses for first two years

- Almost no major reforms in EPA despite numerous reports (e.g., National Academy of Public Administration) noting changes were needed
- Avoid thinking in terms of Republicans are anti-environment and Democrats are pro-environment.
  - The real world of environmental politics is much more complex
  - On coastal matters, coastal state delegations typically vote as a block against land-locked states
  - Air quality issues involved divisions between low sulfur and high sulfur states, states reliant on power from coal plants vs. other sources, eastern states in nonattainment and having acid rain problems and mid-western states, etc.
  - On range land issues, western states tend to vote together
- Avoid the tendency to think in terms of a business vs. environment dichotomy
  - Often differences within groups and numerous examples of strategic partnering and collaboration when interests are aligned
- Reasonable people can often look at the same data and disagree – there is almost always two or more sides to an issue
  - The goal of this class is to help you understand how to analyze these arguments and reach your own informed opinion of the issues