

Introduction to Special Issue on Emerging Ecological Policy: Winners and Losers

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The way we define our rights and responsibilities to the environment is generating increasing controversy. This conflict focuses on questions about the distribution of costs and benefits from natural resource use and environmental protection: what balance are we willing to make between social groups with differing needs and expectations about the use and protection of natural resources? Policy choices we make about biological diversity, endangered species, commodity production on public lands, and outdoor recreation will create a differential array of costs and benefits. All rhetoric aside, clearly, some will win, others will lose.

To many, concern about winners and losers suggests a radical departure from the issues that ecological policies have typically addressed. To others, the debate is just another example of the hyperbole that characterizes polarized battles over natural resource policy. To most, however, the debate is grounded in the questions individuals and organizations have about issues such as privatization, subsidies, and compensation. The conflict has been characterized, to date, by an exchange of assertions, anecdotes, and horror stories about individuals or companies profiting from public lands and/or being squeezed by government rules and regulations that make it impossible to ranch, farm, hike, hunt, fish, mine, or develop.

Often these exchanges are dismissed as isolated, atypical, or just the result of selfish dissatisfaction. But the ever-louder debate reflects a growing need—at local, national, and even international levels—for a careful re-examination by citizens and their governments about assessing the costs and benefits of ecological policy. One key to resolving ecological policy conflicts is wide-ranging discussion about what trade-offs we are willing to make between short- and long-term decisions, public and private benefit, and who wins and who loses.

This special issue of *Human Ecology Review* is the result of a one-day colloquium sponsored by the Center for Analysis

of Environmental Change (CAEC) at Oregon State University on September 23, 1996 to rigorously examine the distribution of costs and benefits of ecological policy. Five scholars with diverse perspectives were asked to explore the most challenging issues related to emerging ecological policy: (1) how can we analyze the distributional consequences of ecological policy; (2) what can we do to stimulate the development of ecological policies that address the needs of both winners and losers; and (3) how do we increase opportunities for cross-agency, cross-discipline, and citizen collaboration in creating such ecological policies? Commentaries from colloquium participants, including a summary of the questions not addressed by the speakers, follow the papers in the *Forum* Section. Finally, recent books related to the distributional consequences of ecological policy are reviewed in the *Contemporary Human Ecology* Section.

CAEC is a partnership housed at Oregon State University that includes the University; the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Experiment Station; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory (Western Ecology Division); and Battelle, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. These four partners established the Center in 1991 to serve as a catalyst for the development of interdisciplinary and multi-organizational programs that examine the causes and consequences of environmental change. Center staff facilitate and coordinate joint proposals and research agenda setting, participate in interdisciplinary research efforts, sponsor scientist exchanges and fellowship programs at the partner organizations, and present workshops, seminars and symposia on cross-disciplinary topics such as Ecological Risk Assessment (1995; proceedings available). For more information about Center activities, contact the CAEC at 541-737-1744 or caec@ucs.orst.edu.