

Twenty-First-Century Challenges for Environmental Management

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Richard N.L. Andrews, *Managing the Environment—Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999). 463 pp., \$65 hard; \$30 paper.

Rosemary O’Leary, Robert F. Durant, Daniel J. Fiorino, and Paul Weiland, *Managing for the Environment: Understanding Legal, Organizational, and Policy Changes* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999). 436 pp., \$34.95 hard.

In its September 1963 issue, *Public Administration Review* published an article entitled “Environment: A New Focus for Public Policy?” (Caldwell 1963). Although the article received the 1963 William E. Mosher Award from the American Society for Public Administration, the term “environment” as a concern of public policy and administration, was novel. Several years were to pass before “the environment” was distinguished from natural resources management, and from Lyndon Johnson’s “new conservation.” Concern for the “environment” in its many aspects—notably in regard to “nature,” has been present in human society for centuries. But only in the latter half of the twentieth century did it acquire a name and become a public issue. Sociologist Robert Nisbet has conjectured that “when the history of the twentieth century is finally written, the single most important social movement of the period will be judged to be environmentalism” (Nisbet 1982, 101).

The two books under review here exemplify this extraordinary emer-

gence in American public policy from a question mark in 1963 to a major issue in 1999. They approach environmental policy and management from somewhat different perspectives. The Andrews book is a history of the emergence of the environment as a public concern and political issue. O’Leary et al. provides a guidebook for managers, public and private, whose decision making infringes upon the environment.

Managing the Environment—Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy tells us where the nation has been in a changing progression of circumstances, perceptions, policies, and behaviors relating to its environment. In contrast to a current fixation on “the market,” as a preferred alternative to political government, Andrews identifies seven reasons why “government involvement in environmental issues is both necessary and inevitable” (2): First, governments assign and enforce property rights, determining who has what right to use or transform the environment and what duties to protect it. Second, govern-

ments define and enforce the rules of markets. Third, governments protect public health and safety. Fourth, governments protect environmental assets from “tragedies of the commons.” Fifth, governments provide collective goods that markets do not. Sixth, governments provide environmental services that people prefer to have provided collectively. Seventh, because governments themselves have environmental impacts. A chronology of environmental policy in America is appended.

Beginning in the 17th Century the European settlers in North America progressively transformed the continent, and in so doing transformed themselves. *Managing the Environment—Managing Ourselves* recounts comprehensively and in detail the historical progression of environmental attitudes, behaviors, and policies. This book is well written, extensively documented, and makes the important point that attitudes and behaviors relating to the environment were strongly influenced by the circumstances of European colonization

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in North America—notably affecting the ownership of land and natural resources. A continuing point of tension in public policy has been between private property rights in land and natural resources as commodities and the public interest in the quality of life and the protection and sustainability of the planet's life-supporting systems.

As a people we “own” nature only in a technical–legal sense, and we manage nature where we are able—for better or worse—only as we manage ourselves. *Managing the Environment—Managing Ourselves* appears to be the most comprehensive account of this aspect of public policy and administration to date. Its title indicates its realistic perspective on our relationship with nature. We have the information and technology to impact upon and to alter the biosphere and life support elements of the environment. We may utilize and undertake to “manage” elements of the environment that we call “resources,” but we cannot manage the elemental forces of nature—the atmosphere, the oceans, violent storms, and climate change. The so-called “conquest” of the continent has perhaps been the most defining element in American history, and an essential aspect of this process has involved efforts to domesticate, manage, and consumerize those aspects of nature amenable to human purpose and technology.

Managing for the Environment describes the changes in organizational responsibilities that accompanied this development. It explains the legal, organizational, and policy challenges accompanying the rise of environmental concern. It is, in effect, a guide to what every organizational decision maker, public and private, needs to know in an era in which environmental issues have become global, entail legal and ethical responsibilities, require attention to public relations, and provide new opportunities for perceptive managers.

Managing for the Environment is intended for a wide audience, not essentially for environmental managers. It has particular relevance “for non-specialists” in three main groups. The first consists of public decision makers whose decisions may have environmental impacts, this group includes elected officials and political appointees; the second is an academic audience of scholars and students of environmental affairs; and the third consists of business people, interest groups, and ordinary citizens. The book takes an integrated approach to environmental policy and management—merging public administration and environmental policy principles.

Managing for the Environment is based on the premise that all managers whose decisions affect the environment must be aware of potential environmental problems; and they must proactively address them if their organizations—and the interorganizational partnering networks in which they labor—are to thrive in the twenty-first century. The book is partially about environmental law (approximately one-tenth of the book), but it also gives environmental managers useful tools: designing effective environmental management systems (ch. 4), working with the media (ch. 5), working with communities (ch. 6), improving risk communication (ch.7), addressing environmental dispute resolution (ch.8), building strategic environmental information systems (ch. 9), managing scientific and technical personnel (ch.10), managing contracts and grants (ch.11), and developing approaches for making environmental policy (ch.12).

Management today is confronted by the difficulty of not only reckoning with the risks and uncertainties of many interactions with the environment, but also of interpreting these circumstances to operating staff and to the various sectors of the concerned public. In forecasting principles, practices and priorities for the twenty-first

century, O’Leary et al. conclude: “Thus we end this book where we began, with the centrality of dynamism, communication, and adaptation as enduring themes of environmental management—armed with the principles, practices and priorities we have summarized, they [the managers] will be better able to understand, co-produce, and deliver the kinds of added environmental values that a sustainable future requires” (358).

Time, experience, and scientific evidence have changed the perception of the environment for most Americans. Public expectations, many implemented by law—federal, state, and local—have extended and complicated managerial functions. Pioneer values and expectations persist; but congressional adoption of the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969 defined the values that should not only guide the decisions and actions of the federal government, but should also be respected by every private activity dependent upon federal authorization. This includes all federal business contracts, licenses, permits, and other activities having major impacts on the environment.

Public and private organizational management now face responsibilities previously unrecognized, many of which are now legally sanctioned. With respect both to the workplace and the external community, managerial policies and decisions must now take account of their impact upon circumstances that we now recognize as environmental.

The American people have undertaken the near-total management of the natural environment upon which an artificial environment of human technology has been imposed. This development is of a magnitude and complexity with little historical precedent, and it entails many possibilities for inadvertent error.

Both books end on a positive note, although Andrews may be read to suggest some uncertainty regarding

America's environmental future. A question remains to be answered: has human ingenuity created a world which humans may be unable to manage? These books do not directly address this possibility, but Andrews concludes his book with the admonition that: "The enduring challenge for American environmental policy, in short, is to build and maintain public support for effective governance of the environment; for managing the environment by managing ourselves" (372).

References:

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- Nisbet, Robert. 1982. *Prejudices, A Philosophical Dictionary*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.