Current Events

Environmental Politics and Policy-Making

1. Institutions and Government

Institutions are groups of long-lasting structures, rules, and standard operating procedures - for example, UMSL is long-lasting – it includes structures (colleges, departments, and services), rules (for getting a degree) and standard operating procedures (registering for class, for class times and places).

Institutions create order and predictability.

Government is a set of institutions with the legitimate right to use coercion within a given territory – and government rules include laws.

Governments rule parts of the earth’s landscape and water

Governments are run by humans for humans
- they govern the environment for humans
- they manage natural resources for humans

Governments govern the environment through public policies and institutions

- Government institutions and laws are hard to change, especially in the U.S.
- Therefore if you can get a law made and enforced, it will be hard for your opponents to change it. But if you want to change a law or institution (and especially a Constitution), it is very difficult.
2. The U.S. Constitution

James Madison’s dilemma: making a lasting national republican government
– rule by “the people” that would do more good than harm

The solution: create a really complicated government that is chosen by the people but is really, really hard to use.

Give different powers to among institutions with different standpoints:

Separation of Powers in the federal government:
   Congress, the president & executive branch, & the courts

Separation of Powers between the federal and the state governments (federalism)

The Constitution encouraged fragmentation, pluralism, incrementalism and state & local initiatives in environmental policy (see Rosenbaum)

3. The Separation of Powers & the Policy Process

a. Congress - a fragmented law-making body

   Mostly, a collection of parochial standpoints.

   The House of Representatives

   The Senate (you need 60 of 100 votes to get most policies through the Senate)

Small states have disproportionate influence in the Senate:

California’s 2 Senators represent about twelve percent of the U.S. population

Wyoming’s 2 Senators represent two-tenths of one percent

   This tends to help resource-rich states with small populations (Wyoming and Alaska),
   but there are small states whose Senators are strong environmental supporters (VT)
b. The President and executive branch

What can a president influence?
   i. The national agenda through legislative priorities and appointments
      Trump EPA Director: Scott Pruitt
   ii. budget priorities
   iii. executive orders
      Trump has reversed Obama on environmental actions
   iv. agency priorities
   v. international agreements
      Obama endorsed and pushed for the Paris climate agreement
      Trump announced the US is withdrawing from the Paris agreement

The Bureaucracy

The problem of controlling bureaucratic discretion

c. The Courts

   • an independent view of environmental issues
   • Interpretations of laws and the Constitution may differ from other branches
   • Court decisions can have far-reaching consequences
   • Example: Massachusetts v. EPA 2007

4. Federalism

Federalism: Political authority divided between a national government and subnational (or regional) governments

States matter because state policies affect the environment
States have a strong interest in natural resources within their borders managed

So…State standpoints

a) State resource management has provided prosperity, jobs and tax revenues for states - and all these things are politically popular.

b) State and local governments usually make market-driven economic growth a top priority

c) But some state (& local) governments are usually the first to put an issue on the public agenda