

Unintended Consequences of Environmental Policy

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A new look at environmentalism is long overdue. The impasse of policymaking to address almost any issue addressing environmental harms or preservation has led us dangerously close to societal paralysis. Solving problems through law, regulation, science and technology, through a research strategy that will consider historical environmental policymaking where unintended consequences had negative effects on the environment or on some other sector of society, is needed.

To do this, case studies are examined that span the period of modern environmentalism which starts with the chemical revolution around the time of World War I, to the present. The examination of these case studies includes interdisciplinary methods, using psychology, sociology, the environmental sciences, engineering, and other relevant disciplines. From the psychology literature, utilizing the findings of the American Psychology Association (APA) project to understand individual motivation to address environmental problems including climate change is also used. Sociology methods from perception studies is also used.

Case studies drawn from environmental law and policy involving DDT, the coffee trade, water law, climate change and others illustrate these principles of unintended consequences in environmental policy, and needed changes to policy processes are proposed.

The “Unintended Consequences of Environmental Policy,” explores the past, the present and the future as a pathway to understanding our mistakes of the past, and assessing and amending our problemsolving processes that resulted in these mistakes. Using historical case studies in environmental policy, each illustrating a principle or process in unintended consequences, proposed that these unintended consequences could have been avoided. Drawing from methods of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary solutions that might have prevented these results, a new environmental policymaking process is proposed.

The “past is prologue” has never been more true than when applied to environmentalism. Moving intelligently into the future requires that we alter our policy making processes, learn from the past and avoiding repeating our mistakes. We are at a crucial point in our environmental history where these needed changes will be ignored to our peril.