

ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION MAKING

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DECISIONS about the environment are often disputed. This is hardly surprising, since environmental decision making is in many respects like other decision making: it involves attempts by competing groups to influence outcomes in ways that they favor. Laws and expenditures to protect the environment in specific places and ways are perceived and evaluated differently by persons and groups with different interests, e.g., with different places of residence, different sources and levels of income, and different values or preferences regarding the use of their resources, those of others, and the resources which by their nature belong to no one. Environmental decision making is thus a form of the more general phenomenon of societal decision making in democratic societies.

Yet in important respects, the processes as well as the content of decision making on environmental issues are different from those of most other decision making, and the differences make environmental decisions among the most complex and difficult faced by society. Society has a vital need for the assistance of scientists in the making of decisions about the use of the environment. Moreover, the interest groups that seek to affect the outcomes of environmental decisions are influenced and often dominated by scientists, and thus a significant part of the study of environmental decision making deals with scientists and their relations both with government and with involved citizens' groups.

Government, scientists, and citizens' groups are all parts of the system of scientific and lay discussion, review, and decision-making processes that is currently developing in the industrialized countries. One example of the functioning of this system can stand for many. A mathematical model was recently used to

