

## Publications

**Global Environmental Governance** by James Gustave Speth & Peter M. Haas (2006), xii + 179 pp., Island Press, Washington, DC, USA. ISBN 1597260819 (pbk), USD 19.95.

If you are looking for a simple and straightforward explanation of how the environment is being managed at the international level, this is the book for you. Written for undergraduates, the language is very clear and all terms are defined, requiring no previous understanding of the issues. Although written for a US audience, the authors also recognize that impressive steps in environmental governance are being taken by the European Union. Nor do they hesitate to be critical, pointing out that the US has one of the worst records in the world when it comes to adoption of international environmental agreements, even those that it heavily shaped and signed (the Kyoto Protocol and the Convention on Biological Diversity are two outstanding examples).

As a relatively brief introductory text (just 150 pages of text), it does not claim to be comprehensive but focuses on 10 major global environmental challenges: acid rain and regional air pollution, ozone depletion, climate disruption, deforestation, land degradation and desertification, freshwater degradation and shortages, marine fisheries decline, toxic pollutants, loss of biological diversity, and excess nitrogen. It provides a brief history of global environmental governance from the 1972 Stockholm Conference up to the present. An especially strong chapter is the one addressing the United Nations system, reflecting the insights gained by the first author as the administrator of the UN Development Programme. The book concludes with a chapter containing alternative visions on how to improve global environmental governance, containing brief excerpts from Lester Brown, Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Gus Speth, Paul Hawkin, Amory and Hunter Lovins, Herman Daly and Joshua Farley, and William Shutkin and Ronnie Lipschutz, with some of these excerpts extending to several paragraphs.

Surprisingly, for a book designed for university students, there are very few links to websites where further information could be found. Websites were not even given for the new systems of environmental information developed by the UN Environment Programme, although the systems are helpfully listed in a box. Virtually all university students today are computer literate and very willing to use the internet to follow their interests. It would have been extremely helpful if they had been given more hints about where to start. Students may, for example, want to know

more about the claim by the authors that agricultural producers in the developing world lose about USD 24 billion a year due to trade barriers and subsidies in industrial countries. Some will also wonder why the authors claim that the 'quest for planetary stewardship' began only in the 1980s, when they describe the 1972 Stockholm Conference in some detail, pointing out that its most tangible and enduring legacy was the creation of the UN Environment Programme, surely part of a quest for planetary stewardship. Important international conventions also followed in the early 1970s, including those addressing World Heritage, trade in endangered species, and wetlands of international importance.

The book is authoritative and accurate in most particulars, although it misses some nuances. For example, it points out that the Earth Charter was not agreed by governments, which is true as far as it goes. Yet an Earth Charter Commission has been established, along with a Secretariat at the University for Peace. It might be useful for students to know more about this (see <http://www.earthcharter.org>). In addition, the funding window under the GEF is not for 'international waterways', but international waters, a minor but important distinction. The text also slips when stating that the Kyoto Protocol required ratification by 55 Annex I Parties to enter into force when only 34 countries appear in Annex I.

The text will certainly give students a very thorough insight into various aspects of international environmental negotiations. For example, the authors point to an inescapable reality of the science-policy interface, namely that scientific disagreement is a characteristic of the scientific enterprise, whereas policy-makers are seeking certainty (or at least plausible denial).

In looking towards the future, the authors describe several alternative world views, including cornucopians, Malthusians, reformists, social greens, and bio-environmentalists. Although seeking to appear neutral, the authors clearly come down on the reformist side in hopes of improving environmental governance. They speak approvingly of a potential new World Environmental Organization, recognizing that new approaches are required at the international level. In considering the various proposals, they support the need for fundamental changes to address the underlying causes of environmental damage, reduce the concentration of power, and empower civil society. They clearly hope that this revolution can take place through reasoned dialogue. Let us hope they are right.

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