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## SYMPOSIUM: WATER RESOURCES AND PUBLIC POLICY

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### INTRODUCTION: WATER RESOURCES AND PUBLIC POLICY

Were one to gaze intently into water resource research, much of the universe of public policy studies would be found reflected there. When public policy studies were still in public administration, scholars and practitioners who believed there were scientific principles of administration used water as a particularly bad example. In arguing for a consolidation of the far-flung federal jurisdictions in natural resources into a single department, one analyst remarked, "The classical example of waste and duplication is in the water resources development field" (Mister Z., 1961, p. 198). The counterpoint to the Wilsonian bias toward centralization was represented by other water scholars who preferred decentralization and competition (Ostrom, 1971). This different perspective was in tune with the then-emerging appreciation in public policy for the process of mutual adjustment and successive limited comparisons (Lindblom, 1959). It also recognized the usefulness of comparing the development, management, and delivery of water to other policy arenas for which economic concepts were relevant.

Cost/benefit analysis gradually emerged as an important and widely used tool in policy analysis but has long been used and abused in water resources. While it had served to eliminate some water projects whose costs promised to outweigh benefits, historically it had been manipulated to clothe politically desirable projects "with the fig leaf of economic respectability" (Marshall, 1965, p. 294). Similarly, the antecedents of risk assessment, a form of policy analysis currently widely recommended, can be found in the analytics performed to estimate probable floods.

Before the notion of iron triangles found its way into the mainstream of policy analysis, Arthur Maass (1951, p. 24) described the symbiotic relationship that existed between local water interests, congressional members of the Public Works Committees, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Furthermore, Theodore Lowi's notion of distributive politics seemed perfectly tailored to and was soon applied to Western water development (Ingram, 1969; Mann, 1975). A variety of other public policy frameworks, concepts and trends found their way into water resources research in works far too numerous to catalogue here.

The purpose of this symposium is to provide some recent reflections of public policy studies in the field of water resources. The following papers present but a small and, due to space constraints, a necessarily unrepresentative sample of the public policy studies with a substantive focus on water. We chose the papers with an eye on picking up new approaches to water policy analysis. We have selected papers which seem to us to exemplify the working through of contemporary issues in policy studies, or, in some cases, current issues in water politics. While a number of studies of state water policies and federal agencies and programs are going on, they are not included here.

Reflecting contemporary concern with economic efficiency and the need to remove unjustified expenditures from the federal budgets, the symposium begins with an examination by an economist, Delworth Gardner, of the institutional impediments to efficient water allocation. Not surprisingly, he finds that much of the misallocation of water resources can be corrected through the operation of markets. In their article "Community Values in Southwestern Water Management," Stephen Mumme and Helen Ingram argue that important values outside its utility as a commodity are bound up in water, especially for poor rural peoples. They argue that the political process better accommodates these noneconomic values than do markets. The paper by William Blomquist and Elinor Ostrom occupies what might be called the middle ground between a purely private and a governmentally-imposed solution to commons problems of which water is a subset. While they view water primarily as an economic resource, they consider cooperative responses necessarily involving the public sector more fruitful than individualized responses in the resolution of common resource problems.

The paper by Tim Miller takes up the difficult issue of whether and how iron triangles in water policymaking--which have been highly resistant to change--have been modified in recent years. Miller concludes that opportunities for change are governed by policy pacing and that the Carter administration failed to fully exploit an opportunity through poor political strategy. Nonetheless, the water subsystem is being forced to adapt. Jeff Romm and Sally Fairfax also take up the issue of change; in this case, federal-state relations that were initiated by a Supreme Court decision rather than by a president. They argue that the *Rio Mimbres* decision, usually regarded as severely restricting federal government influence in water because it restricts federal reserved water rights, will actually lead to greater and perhaps more beneficial federal-state negotiations and exchange in the management of national forests and the water supplies they provide.

The final paper in the collection focuses upon the environment of public opinion which provides demands and supports for water resources policy action. Nicholas Lovrich, Jr., John Pierce, Taketsugu Tsurutani, and Takematsu Abe present a comparative study of the sources of public beliefs about pollution in the United States and Japan.

Water is a resource having economic value but it also is unique in its flow and common property characteristics and its distinctive valuation by publics who depend on it (as we all do). To what extent should it be treated as economic property to be valued in the market and to what extent should government intervene to protect water's unique values? Governments *will undoubtedly* continue to play roles in water resources decisions but which governments through which channels exercising what powers? Taken together, the six papers in this collection suggest, as they should, that the study of water policy mirrors variety, differences, and continual change.

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