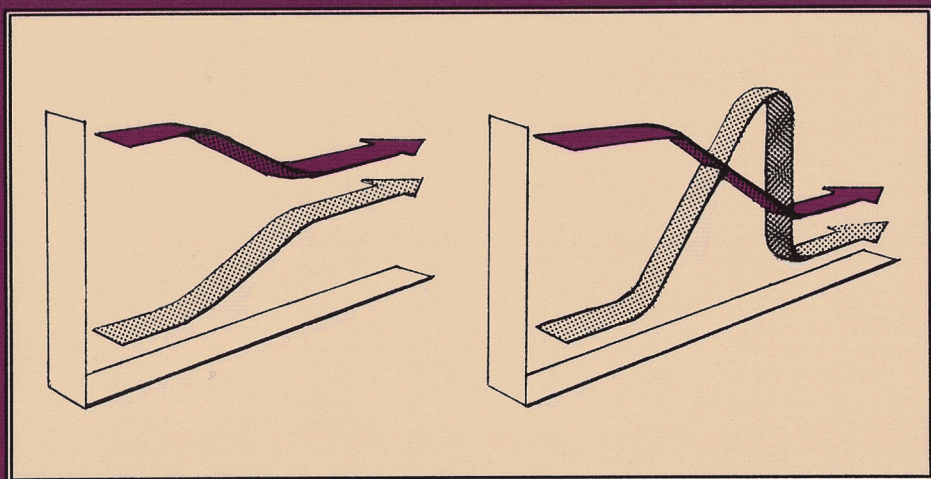


Environmental Decline and Public Policy

Pattern, Trend and Prospect

Timothy C. Weiskel
and
Richard A. Gray



THE PIERIAN PRESS

*Environmental Decline and Public Policy:
Pattern, Trend and Prospect*

Public policy decisions we make today will largely determine the environment that we and our children will inhabit in the decades and centuries to come. Ill-conceived or misdirected public policy can aggravate long-term environmental decline and provoke large-scale ecological disaster.

There is nothing new in this. The archaeology of ancient cultures serves as a sober reminder that mistaken public policy choices have had a costly and enduring impact on entire civilizations in the past.

In our own day Third World regions are experiencing the most rapid and dramatic cases of ecological decline. Patterns of resource extraction and agricultural change engendered during periods of colonial rule and sustained by international trade in subsequent decades have left these regions with depleted assets, vulnerable economies, and rapidly deteriorating ecosystems.

On a global scale, population growth, accelerated urbanization, and the increasing petro-intensification of world food production have created a powerful vicious circle that is driving industrial civilization, like many urban cultures in the past, toward a syndrome of overshoot and collapse.

Can public policy makers slow down or reverse these trends? Can we avert this syndrome? Can elective democracies generate leaders with the insight, foresight, and leadership skills needed to address these problems effectively in the time that we have remaining to act?

Adopting an evolutionary and historical perspective on these questions, Timothy Weiskel argues that a new kind of public leadership is called for and a newly informed and motivated citizenry will be required if we are to succeed in devising effective environmental policy.

Initially presented as testimony by Timothy C. Weiskel in hearings before the United States Senate, the chapters in this volume have been expanded, and further supplemented with extensive annotated bibliographies by Richard A. Gray. The work provides a valuable introduction to both the historical patterns and contemporary trends of environmental decline. It will be of interest to students, educators, government officials, environmental activists, civic leaders, and all those concerned with the impact of public policy on the prospects for human survival.

Timothy C. Weiskel is an anthropologist and historian. He received his B.A. from Yale and doctorate from Oxford University. He is currently the DIRECTOR of the HARVARD SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES of the HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL, and the ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR of the PACIFIC BASIN RESEARCH CENTER at the CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS of the JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT at Harvard.

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