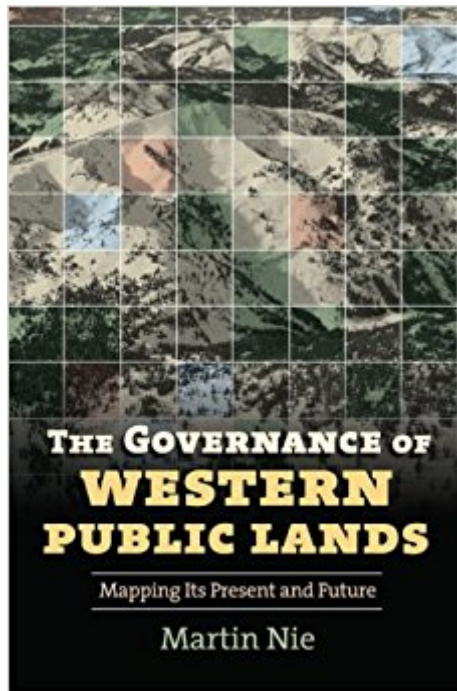


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The Governance Of Western Public Lands: Mapping Its Present And Future



Synopsis

Issues like clearcutting, wilderness preservation, and economic development have dominated debates over public lands for years, yet we seem no closer to resolving these matters than we ever were. Martin Nie now looks at why there continues to be so much conflict about public lands and resource management-and how we can break through these impasses. Showing that such conflicts have been driven by interrelated factors ranging from scarcity to mistrust and politics, he charts the present status and future prospects of public lands management in America. Nie looks closely at two of today's most intractable conflicts: the designation of U.S. Forest Service roadless areas and management of the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. He uses these cases to investigate more inclusive issues about governing federal lands in the West, such as the contested use of science and litigation, lengthy planning processes, and controversial practices of Congress and the president in managing environmental disputes. Along the way, he addresses such other conflict areas as snowmobiles in Yellowstone, bear and wolf protection, fire and forest health, drilling in Montana's Rocky Mountain Front, and federal grazing policy. Nie emphasizes the complicated and often contentious interaction between the branches of the federal government as a major factor in misunderstandings. He particularly cites the problem of vague statutory language, which tells our public land agencies little about what they should be doing but lots about how they should be doing it. Nie reexamines this confusing body of law and policy, in which the rulemaking process wags the dog and agencies are caught in political quagmires, to show how the pieces fitâ "but more often don't. Throughout the book, Nie considers the factors that make some public land conflicts so controversial, revisits how they have been dealt with in the past, and proposes ways they might be better managed in the future. Eschewing the single-policy approach to public lands managementâ "such as encouraging free marketsâ "he instead surveys a diverse array of other available options. His big-picture outlook for the twenty-first century is a bold call for reshaping ongoing conflictsâ "and for reinvesting in our public lands.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

No question that land use and resource policy in the Western lands is an important subject. A clear exposition that covered the history and balanced presentation of the heated controversies would be a welcome contribution. But I found this book's style so convoluted and discursive that it did not provide me what I hoped for in terms of clarification of history and issues. Case studies normally offer realistic detail. The book's case studies also failed to meet expectations. Normal practice for case studies is to begin with straightforward description. In the case of Nie's review of the Roadless Rule (restrictions or prohibitions on building roads, that might serve mining or logging activities) one might have expected a concise summary of areas involved, chronology of major developments, citing the issues and actors. Readers would then have had hooks on which to hang later interpretation and discussion. In this case, however, the author opens by interpretive discussion about how vague many environmental laws are and that agencies are given much discretion in interpreting them. The next paragraph underscores this statement by asserting that Congress chose to delegate discretion to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). After more generalized discussion, including incidental reference to the author's recommendations of online rulemaking, "more inclusive ways of scoping public opinion", "embedding stakeholder-based collaborative groups in rulemaking", etc, the author establishes the contradictory point that President Clinton used his executive authority to issue stringent controls on mining through the Roadless Rule - and President Bush reversed course with 3800 new regulations.

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