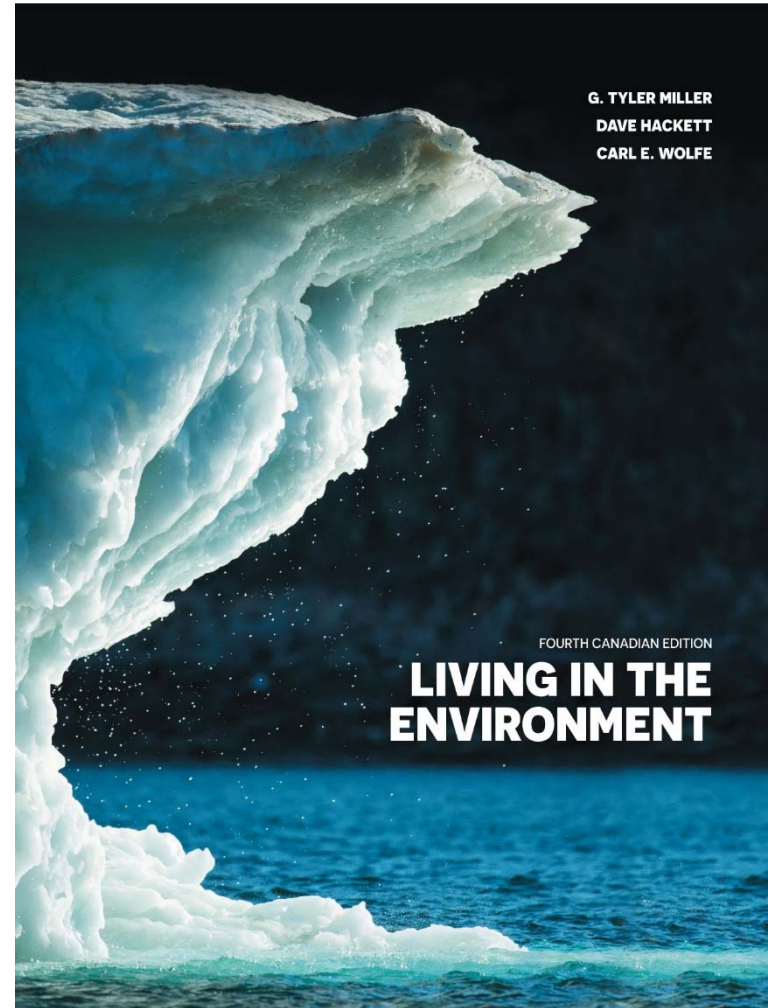


# Chapter 27

## Politics, Environment, and Sustainability



# Key Concepts

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- ✦ Major environmental and political challenges
- ✦ How democracies work
- ✦ How do we influence, develop, and implement environmental policy?
- ✦ Role of environmental law
- ✦ Types and roles of environmental groups
- ✦ Global environmental policies and treaties

# Environmental and Political Challenges For This Century

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## ✦ Major shifts in environmental concerns

- Human impact on biodiversity or natural capital
- From local to regional and global
- Climate change
- Pollution in developing nations
- Poverty
- Synthetic organic chemicals
- Globalization of problems and solutions

# What Is a Democracy?

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- ✦ Representation by elected officials
- ✦ Constitutional democracy
  - Constitution defines government authority, power limits, guarantees free speech
- ✦ Branches of government
  - Legislative, executive, judicial
- ✦ Stakeholders
  - Special-interest groups
    - Both profit-making and not-for-profit (NGO)

# Factors Hindering Democracies in Dealing with Environmental Problems

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- ✦ Short time between elections shifts the focus to short-term issues.
- ✦ Politicians often lack ecological literacy.

# Principles to Guide Environmental Policy Decisions

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- ✦ Humility
- ✦ Reversibility
- ✦ Precautionary
- ✦ Prevention
- ✦ Polluter pays
- ✦ Integrative
- ✦ Public participation
- ✦ Human rights
- ✦ Environmental justice

# How Can Individuals Affect Environmental Policy?

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- Become informed on issues.
- Run for office (especially at local level).
- Make your views known at public hearings.
- Make your views known to elected representatives.
- Contribute money and time to candidates for office.
- Vote.
- Form or join nongovernment organizations (NGOs) seeking change.
- Submit an article or a letter to a newspaper.

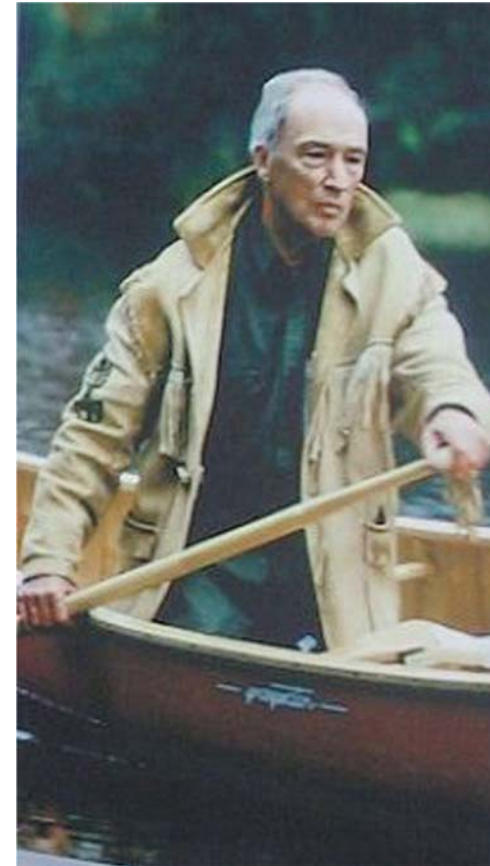
# What Is Environmental Leadership?

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Vision, focus, resources, and support to people wanting to have positive environmental impact

## How have political leaders compared?

- Trudeau (Sr.) loved nature but had a patchy record on the issues.
- Mulroney negotiated major international agreements.
- Harper weakened regulations and science.
- Trudeau (Jr.) pledged to make the environment a priority.



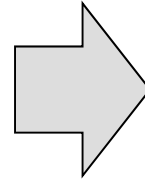
By Jean Demers, Still Photographer on the TV series  
Pierre Elliott Trudeau Memoirs © Éditions La Fête Inc.



# How Can Organizations Change to Foster Better Policy Making?

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## Hierarchy



## Network

- Rigid structure
- Lack of information at top
- Minimal innovation

- Open information flow
- Adaptive management
- Leaders provide vision

# What Is Environmental Law?

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Defines reasonable environmental behaviour,  
balancing competing interests

## ✦ **Statutory Laws**

- Developed and passed by legislative bodies

## ✦ **Administrative Laws**

- Rules about the implementation/interpretation of statutes

## ✦ **Common Law**

- Unwritten rules based on past cases and practice

# Key Terms in Environmental Law

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## ✦ **Civil Suits**

- Between private parties
- Plaintiff *vs.* defendant

## ✦ **Nuisance**

- Property use causing annoyance or injury

## ✦ **Class Action Suit**

- Civil suit on behalf of a collection of citizens

## ✦ **Negligence**

- Knowingly acting in an unlawful or unreasonable manner

# What Factors Hinder the Effectiveness of Environmental Lawsuits?

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1. Challenging to establish legal right or **legal standing**
2. Expensive, especially for individuals
  - Legal fees may be tax-deductible for corporations but not for public-interest firms
3. Must establish that the defendant caused the harm

# What Factors Hinder the Effectiveness of Environmental Lawsuits?

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4. Statute of limitations
5. Court decisions may take years
6. Countersuits by corporations

**Mediation** provides a faster, less costly alternative.

# Case Study: What Are Some Major Environmental Laws in Canada?

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- ✦ Standards for pollution levels
  - **Canada Water Act (1970)**
- ✦ Screen new substances for safety
  - **Canada Environmental Protection Act (1999)**
- ✦ Encourage resource conservation
  - **Fisheries Act (1985)**

# Case Study: What Are Some Major Environmental Laws in Canada?

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- ✦ Protect an ecosystem, resource, or species
  - **Species at Risk Act (2002)**
- ✦ Evaluate environmental impact of a proposal
  - **Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (1992)**
  - Harper government repealed and revised this with much-restricted powers

# What Are the Roles of Major Environmental Groups?

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- ✦ Monitor environmental activities
- ✦ Lobby for new or stronger environmental laws
- ✦ Collaborate with companies on environmental solutions
- ✦ Raise awareness of issues
- ✦ Includes grassroots, global, and issue-based groups



# Setbacks Faced by Environmental Groups

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- ✦ Organized movement against environmental groups
- ✦ Bearers of bad news are not received well.
- ✦ Many citizens support environmental laws but do not prioritize them.
- ✦ Focus has shifted from visible problems to difficult-to-understand underlying issues
- ✦ Different environmentalists have been in conflict with each other.

# Spotlight: What Can You Do?

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- ✦ Vote wisely.
- ✦ Keep pressure on politicians.
- ✦ Convince your neighbours.
- ✦ Join an organization.
- ✦ Take legal action.
- ✦ Seek media coverage.
- ✦ Take economic action.



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# Global Environmental Policy

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National or global security generally focuses on **economic** + **military** security.

Should we expand the definition to include **environmental** security?

# Global Efforts on Environmental Problems: Trade-offs

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## Good News

- Environmental protection agencies in 150 nations
- Over 500 international environmental treaties and agreements
- UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
- The 1992 Rio Earth Summit adopted key principles for dealing with global environmental problems.

## Bad News

- Most international environmental treaties lack criteria for monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness.
- The 1992 Rio Earth Summit led to nonbinding agreements without enough funding to implement them.

# Global Efforts on Environmental Problems: Trade-offs

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## Good News

- 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit
- 2012 Rio+20 Summit
- The eight Millennium Development Goals, designed to achieve specified goals by 2015, showed how rapid progress could be made through organized global cooperation.

## Bad News

- The 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit failed to provide adequate goals, deadlines, and funding.
- The 2009 Copenhagen Conference failed to make concrete progress toward dealing with climate change.

# Spotlight: Rio+20—Two Decades After the Rio Earth Summit

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## ◆ Focus

- Develop green economies for sustainable development and poverty eradication.
- Create institutional frameworks to advance sustainable development.

# Spotlight: Rio+20—Two Decades After the Rio Earth Summit

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## ✦ Successes

- Largest UN conference ever held
  - 40,000 participants
  - 100 government heads-of-state represented
- \$513 billion USD committed to sustainable development
- 700 voluntary commitments to action

# Role of International Environmental Organizations

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- ✦ Gather and evaluate environmental data.
- ✦ Develop environmental treaties.
- ✦ Provide funds and loans for sustainable economic development.

*For example, UNEP, WHO, UNDP, FAO,  
World Bank, GEF, IUCN*



# International Environmental Treaties: Solutions

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## Problems

- Take a long time to develop and are weakened by requiring full consensus
- Poorly monitored and enforced
- Lack of funding for monitoring and enforcement
- Treaties are not integrated with one another.

## Solutions

- Do not require full consensus among regulating parties
- Establish procedures for monitoring and enforcement.
- Increase funding for monitoring and enforcement.
- Harmonize or integrate existing agreements.

# Developing and Measuring Environmental Progress

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## ✦Goals

- Creative solutions at a local level
- Cooperation between citizens, businesses, officials

## ✦Measures

- Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI)
- Environmental Performance Index (EPI)
  - Canada ranked #24 out of 142 countries in 2014 (sharp decline from 2006)

# Guidelines for Cooperative Environmental Problem Solving

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- ✦ Recognize that business is not the enemy.
- ✦ Emphasis on prevention or minimization
- ✦ Use marketplace solutions rather than laws.
- ✦ Find win–win solutions.
- ✦ Stop exaggerating (i.e., reduce using dramatic rhetoric)

# Conclusion

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- ✦ Governments have an important role to play in protecting the environment.
- ✦ International agreements need to be binding and enforced.
- ✦ In democratic societies, there are challenges to how much governments can do in the long-term.
- ✦ You can get involved and make a difference.