

## **What They See is What You Get:**

**Who Holds Power, Where the Public Fits in, When Conservers Don't Conserve, Why Bureaucrats Feel Satisfied With the Job They Are Doing, and How All This Affects the Implementation of the Coastal Resources Management Act, The Fresh Water Wetlands Act, and Quonset Point-Davisville Settlement Agreement**

by  
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## I. Introduction

Until recently, neither political researchers nor activists for various causes paid much attention to implementation. Instead, they concentrated on the legislative, or, less frequently, upon the regulative phase, of politics. Now, both of these groups are coming to the realization that the actual implementation of a policy may be a much more important phase. Legislation may be important only to the extent that it actually constrains or determines how the policy will be implemented by some bureaucratic organization.

For this reason, this study has focused on the *implementation* of three permit-oriented land management processes in Rhode Island. These are the Coastal Resources Management Act, the Fresh Water Wetlands Act, and the Quonset Point-Davisville Settlement Agreement. In particular, I have concentrated on one aspect of these three policies, an area where the legislative and regulatory constraints are somewhat similar. This area is the actual permitting process, whereby an application for construction on a piece of land is either approved or denied.

Unlike the majority of the few studies on environmental implementation, I have deliberately chosen not to *focus* on the issue of specificity, although I do consider it. These studies focus on whether or not specific, as opposed to vague, legislation does a better job of guiding implementation.<sup>1</sup> This is because, despite the strong intuitive link, little systematic correlation has been found between specificity and effective implementation.<sup>2</sup> This is due to two causes. First, specificity may lead to better regulations, but better regulations do not always lead to good implementation,

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<sup>1</sup> The classic example is Ackerman, Dennis and Hassler, William: *Clean Coal/Dirty Air*, Yale University Press, c. 1981

<sup>2</sup> Sabatier, Paul, and Suit, G. Wandersforde: "Major Sources on Environmental Policy, 1974-1977: The Maturing of a Literature," *Policy Studies Journal*, Spring 1979, pp. 592-604

as this study shows. Second, specificity is not an independent variable. It is constrained by the complexity of the issue and determined by the political environment under which the policy is drafted. That is, within an upper limit set by their understanding of the complexities inherent in a particular issue, lawmakers *choose* how specific they wish to be, a choice determined, in large part, by the political environment in which they choose. The relationship between such choice and the political environment is what this study focuses on. I show how the political environment causes the success or failure of environmental politics.