

Editors' Note

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Recommended Citation

Virjee, Braunson, and Chelsea Tu. "Editors' Note." *Sustainable Development Law & Policy* 12, no. 1 (2011): 2.

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EDITORS' NOTE

In October 2011 the human population of our planet officially reached the high-water mark of seven billion.¹ According to the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Index, the current rate of consumption will see demand for two planets' worth of natural resources by 2030.² With this increasing demand and the continued development of virtually every corner of the globe, the finite nature of the Earth's resources presents a sobering reality. Through human ingenuity, industry now attempts to supplement scarce resources through research and development of synthetic and other alternatives. However, a simple, stark fact remains: certain resources such as water, timber, and land are fundamental and aboriginal as the basic elements for human survival. As the demand for natural resources rises in a finite sphere, allocation, distribution, management, and governance of these natural resources must be scrutinized. And at the core of any such critique must be the availability of the natural resources themselves.

This issue on Natural Resource Conflicts examines current contestations arising out of the use, distribution, and governance of these finite resources. We survey the globe, exploring the causes and implications of individual and localized conflicts with the ultimate goal of providing viable and successful resolutions. Through the analysis of land-based conflicts centered upon the public lands of the American West, participatory and collaborative management is heralded as one potentially effective method of resolving these disputes. Left unresolved, disputes over natural resources can escalate into public demonstrations and even armed conflicts. For example, where the imbalance of water rights distribution in Latin America favors elites and private corporations, neglected rural and indigenous communities have taken to mass protests. In the resource-rich African continent, natural resources, including petroleum and rare earth minerals, have both catalyzed and fueled violent armed conflicts.³ Only by carefully probing and dissecting these conflicts can we hope to curb such ghastly consequences.

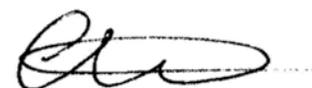
Here at home, highly contested domestic policy debates center around petroleum extraction, especially in the American Southwest. However, the conversation is not limited to traditional

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high-value resources such as oil and diamonds. Instead, scholars are now turning their attention to conflicts emerging from water disputes. For example, conflicts have arisen over water use in Central Asia, stemming from long-term overexploitation and mismanagement. As fresh water resources increase in scarcity, this new "liquid gold" only amplifies the potential for conflict.⁴

This issue of Sustainable Development Law & Policy seeks to facilitate the discussion and understanding of important developments surrounding natural resources and their relationship to various types of conflicts. Our aim is to encourage further integration of sustainable development principles within existing and emerging legal and policy frameworks. The management and governance of natural resources exert a significant influence upon the fundamental survival and security of multiple stakeholders who live near, rely on, or benefit from those resources. Resource development decision-making must take into account relevant environmental, social, and political factors if the international environmental and legal communities are to minimize and ultimately thwart natural resource conflicts.



¹ Haya El Nasser, *World Population Hits 7 Billion*, USATODAY.COM (Oct. 30, 2011), <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2011-10-30/world-population-hits-seven-billion/51007670/1>.

² WORLD WILDLIFE FUND, *LIVING PLANET REPORT 2010* (2010), http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/living_planet_report_20101.

³ *Rising Energy Use: Overview*, WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE, <http://www.wri.org/publication/content/8332> (last visited Dec. 20, 2011).

⁴ See generally Alexander Carius et al., *Water, Conflict, and Cooperation*, in ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND SECURITY PROJECT REPORT 10 (2004), http://www.unep.org/dnc/Portals/155/dnc/docs/ecp/ecspr10_unf-caribelko.pdf.