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"Mountain Forest Policy in Austria: A Historical Policy Analysis on Regulating a Natural Resource"

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Employing a policy analysis framework, this paper inquires into the role institutions played in regulating mountain forests in different political-institutional eras in Austria. Theories from political sciences and environmental history are used for a critical re-analysis of forest historical literature. The analysis finds that the Austrian forest policy is better explained by the historical importance of fuel wood and timber production (pre-industrial time and early industrialisation) than by the goal of securing the multiple values of mountain forests for the public. Since the mid-nineteenth century the forest administration has been aware of those values, but the formulation and implementation of forest regulations rather serves the interests of powerful groups. This is the case for the sustained yield doctrine which promotes economic development, and likewise for the regulation of protective forests in the interest of railways. The installation of a strong forest authority in the mountainous provinces was justified by the protective effects of mountain forests (in politics as well as in the scientific literature). However, it seems that the small forest owners were simply unable to organise effectively against supervision. Forest uses have been governed by local commons, by absolutist regimes and by the market economy, together with State regulations. The changes in forest regulation over time show that institutional settings shape the perception of problems and the conception of solutions. However, institutional transitions do not take place overnight: different institutional concepts may coexist at the same time and institutions may adapt to problem situations. All rights reserved. © 2001 The White Horse Press

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