## Discussion Questions

# Chapter 11 Environmental and Energy Policy

Questions for small groups or larger class discussion.

1. Discuss: What do you see as the greatest strengths and weaknesses of U.S. environmental policies? What policy elements do you think are most in need of change? For example, should the nation rely more on the use of market incentives than on regulation? Should it rely more on information disclosure? Should more responsibility for environmental policy be devolved to the states?
2. Discuss: Consider a specific environmental protection policy, such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, or CERCLA (Superfund). What kind of information would enable you to determine how successful the policy has been?
3. Discuss: Consider a specific natural resource policy, such as the Endangered Species Act or the National Environmental Policy Act. What kind of information would you need to have to determine how effective the policy has been?
4. Discuss: What approach should be at the heart of a U.S. national energy policy? Increasing energy supplies? Decreasing demand? Shifting emphasis to renewable energy resources such as wind and solar? Relying more on nuclear power? Whichever goal you consider to be most important, which policy alternatives are most promising? For example, should policy be based on provision of market incentives (such as higher gasoline taxes) or regulation (such as CAFE standards)?
5. Discuss: What should the United States do about climate change? Should it adopt strong policies to reduce the use of fossil fuels and subsequently limit the emissions of greenhouse gases? Or should it encourage more research for now and hold off on adopting strict requirements until the scientific evidence about climate change and its effects is much more certain? Other than requirements or incentives for reducing fossil fuel use, what kinds of policies should the federal or state governments consider?
6. Discuss: Pick a major contemporary environmental issue (fracking, nuclear energy, climate change in general, overfishing), and consider what the proper course of action should be domestically and internationally. Do we pursue nuclear energy alongside standard renewables? Is fracking dangerous, or is it a practical solution to energy independence and the foundation of a shift away from oil? Do we have an obligation to mitigate climate change, or should our policies be focused on adapting to an already changing world? Do we actually have moral obligations to pursue environmental policy?
7. Discuss: President Obama, citing the gridlock in Congress and Republicans’ unwillingness to work with him on policy proposals, has made extensive use of executive orders. Is this an acceptable way for the president to initiate and implement policy? Should the president be able to forgo working with Congress on these important policies? Since Congress won’t cooperate, isn’t the president justified in moving ahead on these vital issues?