

# Natural Resource Policy Overview

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Federal government policy for diverting land use from crop production began in the early 1930s when policymakers hoped to stimulate depressed commodity prices by reducing commodity supplies. Later in the 1930s, policymakers sought to reduce erosion and depletion of soil by encouraging shifts to cropping practices known to retain top-soil and maintain its fertility. Over the decades, the objectives of soil conservation policy have expanded to include reduction in stream siltation, prevention of water pollution, and creation of wildlife habitat. Agricultural lands have been credited with an array of “environmental services,” including wildlife habitat, natural ecosystems, and a variety of amenities associated with rural settings. In 1972, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments included confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) as point sources of water pollution subject to regulation under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The four papers in this section focus on public policy issues, alternatives, and consequences that pertain to the expanded array of public aspirations for the nation’s agricultural lands.