

Looking Ahead to Inform Policy



A major challenge to fulfilling RFF's mission of improving policymaking through high-quality research is the different realities of the academic and policy worlds.

Rigorous, high-caliber research by its nature

must be methodical, and that takes time. But the policy process often can be chaotic, surprising, and extremely fast-moving. How do we respond to the needs of policymakers while maintaining quality?

One answer is by taking a broad view. By looking at larger issues as well as the costs and benefits of different approaches to specific policy problems, we position ourselves to respond with the right information when the time comes. The theme for our 60th anniversary year, *Resources 2020*, is a look ahead over the next decade. This issue of *Resources* provides examples of the ways we are fulfilling this theme.

We've excerpted remarks given by Joseph Stiglitz as part of our Nobel Laureate Lecture Series, laying out how income inequality is fundamentally intertwined with environmental protection.

Jim Boyd, a co-director of our Center for the Management of Ecological Wealth, reframes the old question of whether resource limitations ultimately will provide limits to economic growth. His approach is to differentiate the areas where human ingenuity is likely and unlikely to provide the innovations we need.

Sometimes the challenge is the bounty of competing policy options in a current press-

ing debate. The future of US climate policy is murky, with multiple approaches on the table. We have rich research programs on three different policy paths, commensurate with the work we carried out when cap-and-trade was the leading proposal.

» Darius Gaskins Senior Fellow Dallas Burtraw looks at the role the Clean Air Act plays in meeting US climate commitments, while making a salutary point about the importance of considering existing institutions when devising policy prescriptions.

» In two separate articles, RFF scholars Carolyn Fischer, Dick Morgenstern, Nathan Richardson, and Rob Williams discuss the nuances of a tax on carbon emissions. When I testified before the Senate Finance Committee late last year, I said that a carbon tax needed more analysis. Work by colleagues at RFF is answering that call.

» Yet another approach is a clean energy standard. Anthony Paul, a fellow in our Center for Climate and Electricity Policy, lays out the benefits and costs and discusses how this policy would interact with state renewable energy portfolio standards.

Whether scanning the horizon or parsing the details of a particular policy, our contributors put into action RFF's primary goal—to ensure that policymakers have the best information when making crucial decisions about how to respond to environmental, natural resource, and economic challenges.

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