2. What is the “Paradox of the Environmental Nation”?

“Looking back at history, protection of forests by nations has repeatedly turned local inhabitants into the enemies of forests” (Radkau 2012: 426). This was the conclusion of the eminent environmental historian Joachim Radkau based on his research on the relationship of national authority with land, forests, water, climate and other elements of the natural environment.

There will be many who be surprised by this assertion. Despite ratification of international agreements on climate, introduction of carbon taxes or providing subsidies for renewable energy; for most of us who are interested in protecting the environment, the issue is not that the intervention of national governments is too great, rather that the actions of governments are inadequate. There are many who believe national governments should be more involved in managing resource exploitation and environmental protection with personnel and funding allocated to these issues. However, if we take the time to carefully consider Radkau’s insights, we find that adequate attention has not been paid to the repercussions of national government policies involving the natural environment on local societies. Although addressing pressing environmental problems is important, the societal approach developed by how “problems” are defined and changes in human society driven by “solutions” may be of greater importance. The reason is that human society determines “what problems should be solved” and it is the human society that is impacted by the solutions. Policies to resolve problems include establishment of nature conservation zones, transition to renewable energy, driving adoption of low environmental impact chemical fertilizers through subsidies or taxation, supporting development of various technologies to control pollution through subsidies or taxation, protection of shared resources by nationalization or privatization.