

Wise Use Is Pernicious Policy

An important warning, directly relevant to Georgist analysis, was sounded in a letter to the *New York Times* by Richard Schuckman of Fair Lawn, NJ, on April 27th. Schuckman points out the dangerous wrong-headedness of the concept of "wise use" of land and resources, which is being championed by such friendly-sounding organizations as Citizens for Sensible Control of Acid Rain and The Information Council on the Environment (both of which are funded by coal and energy-industry concerns). The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, of course, provides for just compensation when the government confiscates private property. But the "wise use" policy incorporates the notion of "takings" — that is, if any government policy decreases the value of an individual or corporation's landholdings, that owner is due a payment from the government. The particular value-degrading policy under discussion is the cost of complying with pollution regulations. These costs can indeed lower the value of a piece of land — for its value has already been inflated by an externalizing of the costs of pollution produced on it. We have seen fit to enact laws to preserve our air, water and forests. Do we now want to weaken them? Were we to allow polluters to shuck the cost of compliance back onto the taxpaying public, that would be the effect.