Soil erosion policy, like other public policies, is a product of incremental politics. That is, our system does not operate in an apolitical manner with “technical experts providing objective, factual information on demand, to the decision maker” who then decides on the best course of action (Randall, 1982, p. 39). Rather, it is characterized by individuals or groups of individuals with various endowments of resources, various access to information, and, therefore, various amounts of political power. Change, which is mainly incremental, occurs when convincing arguments for change coalesce individual dissatisfactions into political majorities that then support proposals for new directions (Randall, 1982, p. 44).

The recent experience with the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) process is illustrative of this contention. In part, RCA was born in response to criticisms that past soil conservation efforts were not always well directed and were having too little impact. One purpose of RCA was to provide a more scientific basis for budget and program decisions, and thereby to reduce what has been a long continuing conflict between the legislative and executive branches of government (Allee, 1982).

The RCA has raised the visibility of soil conservation on the public agenda. It has provided considerable improvement in databases with which to appraise existing soil and water resources. Because appraisal data were to be used for policy evaluation and policy choice, however, RCA was (and is) a political process. “The RCA sought to integrate evaluation into planning and budgeting, but in doing so it posed . . . [a] danger, that the preferred conclusions influence the analysis more than the analysis influences the con-