

Syllabus
Environmental Conservation and the American Landscape
NR 5044 CRN 61839
Summer 2009
Online

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
College of Natural Resources

INSTRUCTOR:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides a comprehensive examination of American attitudes toward the environment and the history of our efforts to protect it. Early European settlers viewed the American landscape through particular lenses, and their attitudes toward landscape changed as they encountered new landforms and types of wilderness as the country expanded westward and matured. By the end of the nineteenth century, we recognized environments that needed to be protected and began to set aside large areas containing special natural features (national parks, monuments, and forests). Throughout the twentieth century, our definition of environments that required conservation expanded further, and we defined “wilderness” within national parks and forests for special protection. By the end of the twentieth century, public efforts to protect the environment were greatly enhanced by private conservation efforts, as the land trust movement matured. Thus, the course will examine changing definitions of the American environment in the context of national development and our evolving strategies of environmental conservation.

GOAL AND EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Goal: To provide a thorough understanding of changing American attitudes toward the environment and the various strategies and mechanisms we have developed to conserve it.

Course Objectives:

- Achieve a comprehensive understanding of how American attitudes toward the environment evolved as the nation spread westward and matured.
- Analyze the relationship between U.S. urban and economic development and land conservation.
- Understand the history and different philosophies of land management of the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service.

- Recognize the difference among environmental conservation, preservation, and protection.
- Be conversant with evolving definitions of “wilderness” and current wilderness management issues.
- Understand the role of environmental protection in preserving cultural resources.
- Understand the use of conservation easements by public and private entities.
- Develop an appreciation for the complex and controversial issues of historic and current environmental conservation

SCHEDULE:

Week 1 – Introduction to Environmental Conservation History; Early European Perceptions of the American Landscape

Week 2 – European Encounters with the West and the First National Parks

Week 3 – The U.S. Forest Service: The Culture of Multiple Use and Sustained Yield; the Bureau of Land Management: Grazing and Mining Policies

Week 4 – The Eastern National Forests: “The Lands Nobody Wanted”

Week 5 – The National Park Service and Growth of the National Park System: Changing Definitions of “National Park;” the Fish and Wildlife Service

Week 6 – Dam Building, Water Policies, and Environmental Consequences

Week 7 – Conserving “Wilderness”

Week 8 – Environmentalism of the 1960s: The National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, and other Protective Legislation

Week 9 – Private Conservation and the Land Trust Movement

Week 10 – Cultural Landscapes

Week 11 – Issues in 21st Century Environmental Conservation

Week 12 – Final Papers and Wrap-Up Discussion

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

There will be short interim assignments throughout the semester and a final paper. Grades will be computed on the following basis:

- Interim assignments – 40%
- Final paper – 40%
- Class participation – 20%

GRADUATE HONOR CODE:

The tenets of the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course, and all assignments shall be subject to the stipulations of the Graduate Honor Code as outlined in the 2005-2006 Graduate Catalog. For more information on the Graduate Honor Code, please refer to the GHS Constitution, located online at <http://fbox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor>. Please contact the instructor immediately if you have questions.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students with special needs or circumstances are encouraged to contact the instructor a.s.a.p. Please do not wait until later in the semester. In all cases, please feel free to contact the instructor, should you have any questions.

READING MATERIALS:

There is no one text for this class. Rather, we will be reading selections from several books, including:

- Alanen and Melnick (eds.), *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Cronon, William, *Changes in the Land*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003 ed.
- Cronon, William (ed.). *Uncommon Ground*. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Nash, Roderick, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Reynolds, John S. and Linda Flint McClelland. *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Sellars, Richard West. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

In addition, selections from other books will be provided on Blackboard, including Shands and Healy, *The Lands Nobody Wanted*; Huth, *Nature and the American*; and Bolgiano, *The Appalachian Forest*.