

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
College of Natural Resources**

*Syllabus*

**Environmental Conservation and the American Landscape  
NR 5044, 3 credits, CRN 17611  
Spring Semester 2009  
Alexandria Center**

**CLASS LOCATION:**

Virginia Tech Alexandria Center  
1021 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA

**MEETING TIMES:**

Tuesdays, 7:00 – 9:45 PM

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Shelley S. Mastran Ph.D., (703) 318-0276, [shellmast@comcast.net](mailto:shellmast@comcast.net)

Office Hours: by appointment.

**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.

## **GOALS 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

## **READING MATERIALS:**

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

Cronon, William, *Changes in the Land*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003 ed.

*Investing in Park Future, Vol. IX: The National Park Service: A Blueprint for Tomorrow*, National Parks Conservation Association, 1988.

Nash, Roderick, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Steen, Harold K., *The U.S. Forest Service: A History*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005 ed.

In addition, selections from other books will be provided as handouts, including Shands and Healy, *The Lands Nobody Wanted*; Huth, *Nature and the American*; Bolgiano, *The Appalachian Forest*; and Alanen and Melnick, *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*.

**SCHEDULE:**

- 1 – Introduction to Environmental Conservation History
- 2 – Early European Perceptions of the American Landscape
- 3 – European Encounters with the West and the First National Parks
- 4 – Gifford Pinchot and the U.S. Forest Service: The Culture of Multiple Use and Sustained Yield
- 5 – The Eastern National Parks: “The Lands Nobody Wanted”
- 6 – The National Park Service and Growth of the National Park System: Changing Definitions of “National Park”
- 7 – Dam Building, Water Policies, and Environmental Consequences
- 8 – Conserving “Wilderness”
- 9 – Environmentalism of the 1960s: The National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, and other Protective Legislation
- 10 – Private Conservation and the Land Trust Movement
- 11 – INTERIM EXAM
- 12 – Contemporary Issues in Public Land Management
- 13 – Case Studies: Shenandoah National Park, C&O Canal National Park, and George Washington National Forest (Suggested)
- 14 – Issues in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Environmental Conservation
- 15 – Final Presentations

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:**

There will be an interim exam approximately three-fourths of the way through the semester and a final paper and presentation.

Grades will be computed on the following basis:

- Interim exam – 40%
- Final paper and presentation – 40%
- Class participation – 20%

## **GRADUATE HONOR CODE**

The tenets of the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course. All students will be required to sign a declaration stating that they have read the graduate honor code, that they understand the graduate honor code, and that they will abide by the letter and spirit of the Graduate Honor Code. The Graduate Honor Code is found at <http://filebox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor/>. Click on GHS Constitution.

Further information, including definitions, can be found at <http://filebox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor/>.

## **SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you need adaptations or accommodations because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological; physical, etc.), if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. My office location and hours are shown above at the beginning of the syllabus.

## **COURSE EVALUATIONS**

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the instructor seeks ways to improve this course and values your input. To that end, you will be asked to complete an informal evaluation mid-term and at the end of the semester as well as a formal evaluation on May 10. At any point during the course, your suggestions and comments are most welcome.

**NOTE:** The course syllabus is a work in progress. Changes and updates will be made to accommodate the needs and interests of the students. Modifications may also be made if natural resource communications issues surface during the semester that may provide a unique learning experience for students.

## **WEATHER LINE**

For weather cancellations, please check [www.ncr.vt.edu](http://www.ncr.vt.edu) and the Weather Alert Line 703-538-8325.